GALLOWS' ORCHARD

JONATHAN CAPE AND HARRISON SMITH, INCORPORATED,
139 EAST 46TH STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y. AND 77 WELLINGTON
STREET, WEST, TORONTO, CANADA; JONATHAN CAPE, LTD.,
30 BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W. C. 1, ENGLAND

GALLOWS' ORCHARD

CLAIRE SPENCER

NEW YORK
JONATHAN CAPE & HARRISON SMITH

COPYRIGHT, 1930, BY
CLAIRE SPENCER

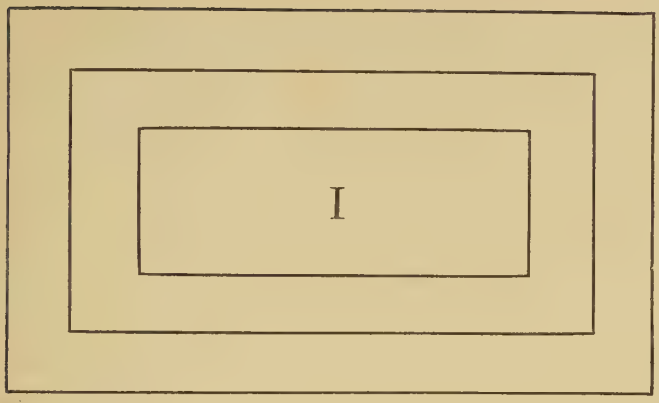
FIRST PUBLISHED IN AMERICA APRIL, 1930

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
MY GRANDMOTHER

MARGARET MURRAY MCGLASHAN

WHO IS DEAD
AND
WHOM I LOVE



LIKE an angry horse she looked, rearing her head, stamping her foot, tossing her head this way and that, till the heavy golden earrings made a tinkle like the sound of a far-off church bell.

You'll be a hard one to thole, I thought, a hard one to get on with, for your ways have no peace in them and no rest. I looked at her again, and I shrank as I always did when I looked at her suddenly, for there she stood, strong and vivid, glowering off into the distance, over and above the green grass and the tender flowers.

In this minute she looked as if she might own every damned stick and stone on the whole countryside, and hold them in great contempt. I don't want to give the

impression that this is a bitter hard creature, lacking altogether in kindness and gentleness. This is not so; she has, like any other, many shades in her character, and each twist of circumstance brought forth its complementary expression and emotion. But strength of character was her most obvious trait, and all her feelings were felt and expressed strongly and clearly, whether they were gentle, cruel, or cowardly.

Her face changed, a sort of withdrawal of feeling took place; her thoughts rushed in a cluster and hid—in some far-off corner of her brain they hid, where they crouched like watching animals. She turned her head slowly, and said, with contempt almost: "We had best go down the hill, for I see him coming up." And every one of us looked down the hill and sure enough there he was, Ernest Weir, the man she was marrying, the man who had kept this daughter of passion waiting almost an hour.

I wanted to laugh.

Ernest Weir was an airy, delicate sort of a lad, and why he was marrying Effie Gallows, nobody knew, although it was quite clear to everybody that she had no great feeling for him, and he, I think, was swept off his feet, and hardly knew what he was doing. A fine way, I thought, to get married!

We strode down the hill, and he came up; he always walked as if his legs barely touched the ground, but

dangled, and in a fluttering futile way took more steps than were necessary to walk.

What made her willing to marry him? It isn't as if he were her only chance; to the knowledge of the village there had been others. One of them, too, was a fine, strapping, curly-headed lad, with a gay hearty laugh, very rare in these parts. He came from some town or other, and was the son of a mill owner, and that made him rich for around here. They used to look a fine sight as they walked down the road together. I have often watched them out of the tail of my eye. He was forever laughing, throwing back his head like a god, and laughing out loud, as if there was no hereafter, and the weavers up and down the street would stop weaving for a bit and listen, and the brats would look up from playing peever; even the animals and the women would be caught by the sound, and their minds would hang for an instant in a listening, critical state.

I often wondered why it was that the women in the town were never jealous of her—though they hated her and were afraid of her tongue—for there wasn't a woman anywhere around who could come near her in looks or carriage, or in any way at all. But I do think that women are like that. . . . I have seen them fairly spit with rage over a girl called Nettie Malloch, who is pretty, in a scattered sort of way, each of her

features being more or less on its own. . . . But I do think that when a woman is truly beautiful—beautiful in a proud way, I mean, with no trickiness at all—then such a creature belongs almost to nature, and every woman who sees her recognizes a certain amount of her true self in her, and is at peace.

Men are cautious about a woman as beautiful as that, and I think that for the most part they felt in her an abstract element that they can never hope to conquer, so most of her lovers have been of the foolishly bold, or the weakly blind. I don't know how I would class myself. I can't say for sure that I do love her; I only know that in some deep, subtle way this woman has captured my imagination and that I compare her with every other woman I meet, and for me they are all poor shoddy things. I often think how I would be had I never seen her; like other lads, I dare say, feeling the breasts of any girl I could lay my hands on, and marrying one with none.

Well, here we were marching down the hill to meet the lover, and each scatters a litter of stones with his feet, and the women prefer to walk on the grass by the roadside, their full skirts slapping against their legs as they walk. Soon Effie and Ernest will have caught up to each other, and he will turn and walk down the rest of the hill with us; then we will walk on through the high street, gathering company as we go, till we

reach the minister's house, where we will go in, and they will be married.

I feel I ought to describe myself a little, my character and appearance, neither of them difficult nor extravagant tasks, calling for neither far-flung word nor deep search for steering motive.

I am very simple; to keep from dissolving into sentiment about the common facts of life is very hard for me. Also, I am romantic, cheaply romantic to a point of debauchery; I love nature. This remark is like me, for what I mean by nature and love are away beyond me; I am forever trying to improve, being neither strong enough nor weak enough to accept my limitations. I am easily destroyed, but just as easily built up again. Emotionally inspired, I will blaze like a Roman torch; but let the first drop of rain fall from a heaven of reason, and I am snuffed out like a miser's candle. I have what I think is a good quality, the power to detach my mind from my person and make it work like a tool on whatever is holding me for the time being, but this, alas! while it helps me to see things clearly and fairly, never gives me the power to control my emotions nor reason with my sentiments, and so whatever thought I may produce, though it be brought forth from my mind as a babe from its mother's womb,

painfully and with much noise, yet do I know the uselessness of the pain and struggle, for has it not lain and kicked through its most telling time in a womb of sugared water?

I am the schoolmaster in the village, teaching everything from botany to the Bible; the children like me and respect me, for I love them and am happy teaching them. Their mothers like me too, for I make no effort to understand their children, but am content simply with teaching them to spell and add, and do not worry them with suggestions or complaints about character or morals. I am for age thirty-two, but look less since I have a rather round face. I am not called good-looking, nor yet ugly, my features being evenly distributed on my face, but not striking; my colour is poor, a composite of all dead colours between grey and yellow; I am tallish, thin, and stooped, but I have fine teeth, which, whether I remember to clean them or not, always look clean. I must have a considerable amount of attraction, for all people are kind to me and always appear pleased to see me.

I think I have done myself well enough now, and will go on with this tale, well content to be through with plain talking about myself; being by nature shy and self-effacing, it has been painful for me and I am well pleased it is over. Other things I might have added: petty vanities and feeble likes and dislikes, but

they seem not to matter, and anyhow I feel sure, very much to my discomfort, that my weaknesses will betray me to you soon enough, and you will end by thinking worse of me than I could ever imagine or give words to. . . . So be it; free I am now to unfold this tale, of wanton and saint, of peace and love and trouble and peace again, and of a white fan-shaped stone set aslant under an apple tree. . . . That is a mark of the end of all, and of this tale in particular.

Now the wedding is over, and here we are all in Effie's house, drinking more than we should. Effie is all smiles again, but self-conscious smiles at that, sailing across the room this way and that, in each hand a plate or a glass, asking some woman: "Would you prefer tea?" . . . Then clap go her hands, and in two minutes in bounces the woman who works for her, and the tea-pot is dumped on the table where it looks for all the world like a fat Turkish Sultan surrounded by its harem of cups.

The pot is empty, the cups are flown—clap go the hands again, and we are all a little uneasy, for things aren't done in these parts that way. You ring a bell for more tea, or you go to the door and stick your head out and call for more tea, but you don't clap your hands together, no, not for anything.

"Would you like another drink? I'll get it for you." "No," I cried, like a fool, and lost a chance of her coming back and perhaps having a few words with her. But never mind, after this drink I'll go up to her and say something. I'll be less like myself then; I'll feel more at ease; I'll be just mildly drunk; I'll be able to talk easily and carelessly and not show how excited and unhappy I am.

I look around the room and there are men standing in little bunches. They're having a good time; there's a secret excited look on some of their faces, for they know there's something queer with the wedding and with the whole party. They know in their simple crafty ways that things are not regular; that, even if they have known Effie and seen her up and down the highroad for these last twenty years—well, they know that she is not of their ilk, nor their wives', nor their daughters'. So they stand and drink and watch. And they know that when the time comes for them to return to their houses there will be a grand time threshing it all out with their women. And the women avoid each other's eyes and drink their tea and lick their lips like cats . . . and some have puckered, dried-up, mimmy mouths, and some have full, loose, moist mouths . . . but they all have the same look behind their eyes. I am shaken suddenly by fear. What are they watching for? What are they waiting for? It's

not safe to go against them; it's not safe not to be like them—for they are strong in their meekness, and there's power and cruelty in their sameness; and now that I come to think of it, Effie hasn't any particular woman friend, and somehow that seems a bad thing.

I looked around the room for Ernest Weir. I felt that he wasn't asserting himself enough, he ought to be asserting himself more. I felt this, you understand, not because I wanted him to shine, although I wasn't jealous of him, but things would look better—that was all—if he were more in the light and less in Effie's shadow.

I found him standing talking to the minister who had married him, and he looked nervous enough.

"I hear we are going to have music."

"Yes," he said in a tired voice. "That will be fine."

"I am very fond of music," the minister was saying dreamily. He has a pink face and thin golden hair, and a wavering smile. Though he had been but two months in the parish, the parish knew him for a man of fanciful imagination, given to whimsical rendering of even the most lurid passages in the Bible; and they despised him for it, one and all. For my part I liked him; his sermons, it is true, were wandering and never appeared to have any point to them, but the Bible as spoken by

him became like a fairy story, beautiful and uncanny; his piping voice had a way of trailing your mind after it into one strange place after another, where, by the magic of his own enchantment, the saints of the Bible became fine talking actors, playing for your pleasure. Never once was the hand of God thrown in your face, nor were the mental thorns of our Lord's crown used to render the seat of the mighty less comfortable. Never did this good but engrossed man shake a trembling finger at his congregation, or raise both hands to heaven, and the face between, in the way that is most telling, or call on God to strike him down. After reading an hour or so he would close his Bible with great reluctance, and the congregation would shake themselves out of their dreaming and lo! their hearts were full of anger, for nothing that he had said was practical, nor could it be used against a neighbour, and—after all, the clanking of pennies was real enough, and everything ought to keep tune with the clanking of pennies—so they were sullen and angry because they missed the excitement of God's law being bellowed at them in a personal way. But the minister, whose name is Claud Kennith, goes about happily and shyly, and he visits the sick, and he feeds the poor, and weeds in his garden, and all with an air of sweet content, for he is not at all aware of his shortcomings, nor his people's anger.

I looked at him pityingly, for I well knew that his days in the parish were numbered.

"We're going to live in this house," said Ernest Weir. He stretched his neck and eyed the room fretfully. "I couldn't very well expect Effie to give it up. It was her father's house, and she's unusually fond of it; it's a little big for my taste and it's not what you'd call cosy, but it has a fine position, and with children around, it will be more gay."

It was as Ernest Weir said, a big house, square and dismal-looking, built of stone. It had never been whitewashed like the other houses about here and sat sullenly on a quick hill. A road bordered by gaunt and wind-torn trees led straight as a dart down to the gate; to walk the hill from the gate was for me always an ordeal, for one walked right into the face of the house, so to speak, and it always gave me a feeling of being watched. It owned four acres in all, most of it behind the house; in front, on either side, there was grass in wild disorder three feet high, which, as the summer grew older, slowly turned to hay. Effie's father would never allow it to be cut. A lawn, he swore, made him think of shallow water, and maybe Effie thought the same, for the grass never has been cut; the whole appearance of the house, to one peering through the iron gate, was that it looked like an empty run-down mansion, and had it been known to

be empty the town would have claimed it a haunted house.

The sight in the back of the house is more cheerful for the land sloped away and one could see the whole of Durkie hanging on the hill, and the highroad seems to quietly appear straight out of the hillside and twist and writhe like a snake, wavering in its direction, but in the end piercing straight through the heart of Durkie, then on and beyond, mounting the next hill, till it disappeared and was gone forever, and since Durkie was seen by the Grey House (as it was called) the Grey House was seen from Durkie, but dimly by day. At night, when the lamps were lit, it stood out like a lighthouse, and when the lamps were doused the house seemed to stand out just as much by its blackness as by its light when the oil was burning.

"The Captain," said the minister to me, "was quite a character, from what I hear."

"A most charming man," said I, in a correcting tone of voice.

"Oh, yes, to be sure! Don't misunderstand me, Mr. John: when I said he was quite a character I implied a deep compliment, I do assure you. I am very given to the unusual, and I have"—and here he smiled roguishly—"a weakness for it. His daughter"—he bowed to Ernest Weir—"is a beautiful and striking creature; it's true I have but seen her a few times, on

the road, and here today. I don't think that she comes to the kirk"—and he said the last in a pleased sort of way, like a happy child, paying her a compliment—"but now since she's wed"—and he bowed again to Ernest Weir—"she'll be coming to kirk with you no doubt."

I doubt it, I said to myself.

"I do hope so, indeed." And Ernest in his turn bowed solemnly to the minister.

You're a couple of stookies, I thought to myself, and, being in my cups a little, I glared at the minister and said angrily: "If you can get Effie to kirk it will be a sad day for God and man."

Ernest looked me quickly in the eyes. "Effie is at heart as good a Christian as any."

"I did not say Christian, Ernest Weir, I said kirk-goer, . . . and if you think—"

"Lads! Lads!" chided the minister, laying a mild hand on my arm. "Go quietly. Not so hasty: that's nothing to fight about. Shake hands on it; it's no time for hard words."

"You're right," I said humbly: "I hope you will overlook it, Ernest." And we shook hands, and his hand was like ice.

A great noise of song came suddenly from the other end of the room.

Soon the whole room took up the refrain, and

Ernest Weir, myself, and the minister, with our arms clicked, solemnly shouted in each other's faces, our eyes all focused on the ground at our feet, till our eye-beams seemed knotted to the spot we circled.

The women's voices wove thinly in and out through the heavy mass of the men's, now and then trailing off when the music climbed to a high point. But when the meaning of the words demanded an expression of sadness they poured (it seemed to my ears) much more feeling than was decently necessary. Singing and arguments, and occasionally a strong laugh forced its way above the noise; the house was now full of people, the parlour, the kitchen, and even the lobby were black with company, and when you looked out the front windows you could see still more trudging up the hill. There was a strong, coarse odour about them all—a stubborn virility. The women seemed to smell of sour milk, and the men you felt had manure on their boots; the gentle among us seemed lost and overcome, and made too delicate to breathe almost. The minister went dreamily from one bunch of red-handed men to another, and wherever he went they stopped their singing and their lewdness and took on stiff poses, looking for all the world like wax figures, static, waiting till he would move on, then all in one unreluctant voice, "Good-bye, Mr. Kennith," and away he went to ossify some other group.

For myself I was wearing a look and stressing a manner of rough vulgarity which I knew did ill become me and deceived no one, but I took a joyless pleasure in it, and I think if my mother had suddenly appeared in front of me, fresh from the grave, I would give her a thump on her bent back, and roar in her face, "Come on, have another with me." And thinking of mothers, I see Mistress Weir, who is Ernest Weir's mother, coming straight at me, and well I know what she wants of me. I must tell her how lucky and happy her son is, for she is sore worried about it. I don't think she has ever taken to Effie, being like most of the women around here, afraid and suspicious of her.

"I would have liked them to live wae me—but she wudna. It'll be lonely for me now Ernest has gone, and sin his father's dead—well, it canna be helped—now." And her hand flew to her eye and wiped the wet away.

Chairs and tables were being wrenched from the rooms and carried up one flight of stairs, to be got rid of, for the fiddlers had arrived and room was needed to dance in.

It's a hard task I have set myself to write about this woman and all that overtook her; not hard from lack of colour, or excitement, or character, but rather I

suppose from an overabundance of all qualities that go to make a person extraordinary and unbelievable. I must always be on guard, for, were I to paint her as truly she is, you might shrug your shoulders and claim me a man mad with love, or one bewitched, or with no sense of proportion. So, it is gingerly and with caution I feel forced to write of her, and perhaps even describe, line for line, the importance of feature and form, for every feature she has is important, and each one is a triumph over the other, and all have the appearance of having been forced almost against their will into their present regularity and precision, and no line can be actually defined nor can one perceive just at what point it bends to its destination. I have seen pictures of churches like that, a triumph of continuity. Her figure also has this quality; in fact, to say she has breasts, or hands, or feet, seems out of place. They are all her, part of her and exist only in unison; her colouring is naturally of the same quality; the skin is almost as clear and dark as amber, with a transparency and softness of texture that one can compare to a flower leaf; her hair has three definite shades of brown verging on red, and it swirls around her head in heavy twists. This hair is a climax to her whole person, for when she moves it moves too, but with such a noise of colour, such a thrill of movement, that one thinks more of flame than anything else.

Her mother died when Effie was in her tenth year, and she and her father lived on together for the next ten years, happy in each other, calling for and apparently feeling no need of company outside of themselves. They were strangely alike, not so much through feature as by expression; in mannerisms and method of speech they were obviously related, but although their tempers were equally fierce, he gave usually an impression of happy good humour, which Effie does not; although neither sullen nor morbid she usually wears a look of moodiness. He never seemed to have to work but had money saved somewhere. He had been a sea captain before he retired, as I told you already, but this is all hearsay, for like his daughter he never spoke of himself or his doings. Every day, when it didn't rain, he would walk to the outskirts of the village and sit under a tree and read from some book. It was regarded in the village as a fair scandal, an old man who read so much and in the open, too. Sometimes they would read together, out loud, he leaning against the trunk of a tree, she stretched out, her head in his lap. Then they would laugh their loud laugh together, regardless of the start of workers in the fields. At times like this the villagers' breasts smouldered with resentment and they looked at each other, questioning each other in their hearts, and uneasy at what they felt was a queerness not accompanied by the usual self-con-

sciousness. Then he died, and was buried, and the village felt that the spell was broken, and no one felt sorry for his daughter. In fact, one never felt sorry for her, and sure enough she appeared just about the same as ever, and lived on alone in the same house, and went to the fair with different lads, and came back decked with ribbons like any other, and laughed on the doorstep as she said good-night.

She was vain in almost a masculine way, looking into the mirror at herself squarely, as a man does, never coquetting or sliding up to the mirror, or softening her eyes, or almost smiling, as most women do, but when she put on her hat, she put on her hat, and since it was her hat, it became a thing of importance and fitted her like a crown.

I must stop, for I could go on in this strain forever and you would be annoyed, and perhaps lose patience with this fine creature and me and my whole tale, and close the book with a snap. I will let Effie speak for herself in future, and you may be sure she will not dwell on her qualities nor hang a halo of words round her head for beauty's sake. But one word more before I leave the subject forever and move myself from between you and the creature I love. Look on the slant of her eyes, on the bend of her neck, and the mouth like a ruby thread. Watch her as she goes her way, down the hill and up the hill—the little move-

ments of her hands, and when she hangs her head in quietness. . . . Is she not as beautiful as I have told you? And surely you understand my feeling for her.

The fiddlers are tuning up, scraping and sawing, putting off as long as they can the time to play, for they smell wine and they have as good a right to get drunk as any. The one you would notice more than the others is by name Neil, strong and wicked-looking, with great sloe-lidded eyes and troubled hair.

"I want," said he, pinching my arm and looking me fiercely in the face, "I want a drink. Whisky. The wine's for the clergy"—and he smiles slyly the minister's way. "I wish"—and here he gave me a soft punch in the ribs—"to meet the bride." And he winked his heavy-lidded eye slowly and solemnly.

"I wish you would hurry and play," says Effie, and she turns her head impatiently. "You came here to play."

He was looking her straight in the face, bending his head to pull down his eyes to her level. "So you're Effie Gallows? I knew your father. I knew him in the far-flung ports of the world"—he waved his arm in a sweeping curve, the fiddle in his hand—"but I never saw you afore, you can depend on that." And he

gazed on her seriously as if taking a vow. The room was in a hush, and he let his strong arm with his fiddle fall quietly to his side. Then with a shake of his head which made the hair move like a bunch of bells, he bellowed out like an angry man: "Another drink and I'll fiddle your legs off. Hey, Donald! Hey, Andy! What are you here for? Come by me. We'll play them till their bones ache."

The three brown-skinned shaggy fiddlers stood in a group, each one with his bow raised high, their chins snuggled on their fiddles, their eyes fast closed. Then, in the same second, slash! go the bows, and a three-stringed cry comes whizzing out, and a tremor goes around the room of pain almost. My heart was beating as if it were the only heart in the world; I felt my bowels ache and I hardly dared take breath for fear of a stab of pain. How long I stood like this I can't say, but I was slowly made conscious that the tempo of the music had changed. Now notes flew hither and thither, jangling and jumping—and through this dazzle of imp-like sound came the thud, thud of heavy-shod feet—touching rock bottom, never capturing the music for a moment, never mounting the rhythm, but pounding in futile rage almost at this mocking music they felt they could never dance down. Above, the faces bobbed like a sea of balloons, vacant and anxious-looking, and they seemed to have no part with the beating feet or

the elfin music. I sharpened my eyes to single out Effie, and there she was, where the fiddler had left her, her hand on her heart. Her head was tilted weakly and her mouth was a line of pain. Through her eyes, I saw, her mind was a thousand miles away. . . . Now Ernest is making his way to her, and she takes his hand and of her own accord she kisses him gently on the cheeks. His whole face lights up and he draws her timorously to him, and they dance with the others—but not like the others, for she looks like one dancing alone and in a gentle swoon. And there's no thud of her feet, for softly, softly they plush the floor's level, lacing this way and that—strongly, yet dreamily, back and forth, and as if by repetition of the same pattern over and over, a spell was captured in which her whole body flowed in willing submission.

I couldn't take my eyes from her face, I couldn't put my mind at peace, for I was sore troubled: What did the fiddler mean? Why had he looked on her the way he did, taking her in with his breath almost, wearing out his eyes looking at her? . . . What if he did know her father? That isn't enough. . . . Why do his eyes follow her forever around the room now? . . . He never takes them off her for a minute. Dear God, what manner of woman is this? Have I to be jealous of this rogue of a fiddler, too? And yet, truly, I can't be jealous, for she's no trollop; and if certain manner of

men lose themselves to her—and all without the least glance from her—how can I complain? For am I not the same, and ought I not to feel a kind fellowship for my brothers, who are drawn like me into her circle, although against their wills? So I look on the fiddler and I feel a gush of sympathy go from me, and strangely enough he alters his eyes to meet mine, and he smiles a smile like a sweet babe stupefied at his mother's breast. Then his head is thrown back, and slash go the bows again, and with the note still hot on the air, down go the fiddles and the dance is ended.

Now voices are loud in talk and laughter, and breasts are carelessly passed over by drunken hands as if by innocent accident, and the women don't mind, but stand with an ignoring air, yet in an expectant state. I've seen this look before—when women stood gossiping and the children pulled at their skirts: they took no notice, but they felt and knew. Couples are moving off, only half conscious of their direction and desire, to the darker lobby, and the dim stairs, and Nettie Malloch is all giggles and tremors, for she doesn't seem to be able to bear with lust as contentedly as the other women.

"John," says Ernest Weir to me, "my mother seems to feel a need to go home. I would hate for her to go

alone." He looked at me limply. "Would you take her? It wouldn't be seemly for me to leave Effie." So, as we pass through the door into the dark cloud-coloured night, the fiddlers are again slashing out, and as we trudge down the long tree-bordered walk the ground still carries the throb of the music, and the beat of many feet. At the gate I turn and look back. The house is all aglow, and strange fantastic mis-shapen forms cut the beams that slip like silver in solid lengths through the slits in the shutters and stretch long entangling fingers in the grass's depth. Mistress Weir does shake her head, and turning her pale twist of a face to mine, she almost sings out: "It's for no good at all, no good at all, I tell you. I know an evil woman when I see one, and Effie's evil—and more than that—she has my son bewitched. . . . But she'll not get me bewitched. And if she's not good to my lad, I'll fight her till she mends her ways. . . . I'll teach her to leave me and mine alone. . . . She didn't wed him for she loved him. . . . She's using him, that's what she's after. She'll chuck him off when she's got what she wants, like she took up with him, through no will of his own. . . ."

"What are you saying, Mistress Weir?" And I tried to pull her clawlike hands down from her face to question her more. But the wet of her old tears, that lay sickly on my wrists, dripping from between her fingers, sickened me and I gave up; and stepping back

from her, I said coldly: "You're beside yourself, Mistress Weir, and I am sorry for you. I think we had better go on our way now, for it's quite a jaunt." And we turned around, but she still held her hands to her face, and this made her walking uncertain, and more out of impatience than kindness I said: "Here, take my arm," which she did; and we walked the rest of the way, each one silent and lost in our own thoughts.

I started to walk back slowly and without any conviction. When my foot kicked and sent scampering a little stone, I would pick it up and hold it close to my face, and examine it, as if it were the only stone I had ever seen, sure that something would be revealed to me about stones that no one had ever thought. . . . Then, when my searching mind grew weary I would put the stone in my pocket.

Then, flattening my face to the sky, I would determine the moon's place behind the fluffy clouds, and patiently wait until she had climbed out from their hindrance . . . and I saw the moon for the first time. I looked on a tree, and it was no longer a tree, but a strange, haunted, wooden shape that I had never seen before. I went down on both knees and felt the short thick grass with the palm of my hands, patting it as

far as I could reach. I pulled a handful and it came up with earth on its roots. Of a sudden I was afraid, for I felt that this wasn't grass that I felt but the very surface of the earth, and between my body on the grass and the slipping moon in the sky, there was nothing that I knew of.

I felt a need of people. I am going to hurry back.... I am going to look on Effie. . . . I am going to see if I have ever seen her before.

So I walked the rest of the way, quickly and passionately, now and then breaking into a run, slowing when at last I saw the house. I opened the gate cautiously and closed it silently, and instead of keeping on the tree-shadowed path, I walked through the long grass that felt like woman's hair. Then, when the light from the windows plunged me in silver, I ran from it to the black of the path.

The house was a mass of solid noise, a noisy substance almost, and little fragments of noise that had somehow escaped the great devouring single noise came flying, screaming through the cracks of the house and the slits between floor and door, mixed with the light, and crazy with the pulse of escape. I stood at the foot of the stairs and burrowed into the black of the door with my night-tuned eyes. . . . The yellow light laid long inquisitive fingers on my face, and the shrill escaping noises hung like a hundred angry bees

around my head, and my heart whom I knew to be my friend in this, beat slowly and deliberately this measure, and my mind supplied the words: "Go away from here. Stay away from here."

But I was young and time had not yet torn the victory from my heart, and scattered my strength like fanciful seed on a granite block. So I shook my head free of the noise and light, and rushed up the stairs and beat with my two fists on the black of the door . . . and I was caught like a midge by the dance and the noise, and wine was poured into my empty glass, and men with distorted faces stopped, when they saw me, and for a second laid a hand on my shoulder and looked on me joyfully as if they welcomed me back from a long journey. Then Effie, my beautiful Effie, swooped down on me like a soft grey bird, and while still in movement she forced into my hand a small round coin, and close to my ear she said quickly: "I found a thrupenny bit, and that's good luck!" Then away she was like a wilful swallow, circling the room, bending this way and that, whirling around and around.

I looked for the fiddler and he still followed her, but not only with his eyes this time. He followed her and chased her with his music, caught up on her with his music, and held her with his music; and she danced wilder and wilder, and stranger and stranger, and every-

one in the room danced for her like a chorus. They no longer danced together, the men and the women, but stamped and circled by themselves, all of them laughing and throwing their heads; faster and faster they seemed to go—a hoarse howl broke from a drunken throat, and in a second all were howling loud and strong. And Effie led this wild gathering, Effie with her slipping gown, Effie with her hair come down, Effie with the fiddler's hand marking red lines on her breast. I closed my eyes and made for the front door, and I walked like an old man down the stairs, but when I reached the gate I heard my name, and Effie came flying down the path to me.

"John, I am sore afraid! John, stay by me!"

We went and sat on an old bench, her hand in my hand, and slowly she calmed. How long we sat there I cannot say for sure, but it grew faintly light; then little trees stood out by themselves, traced on the dimness beyond; now the sun had taken the moon's place and the hills were bewildered with light.

Soon the wedding guests came struggling through the door; one tripped and fell and silently got up again; another, a young lad, was sordidly gay, throwing his legs and arms about, stumbling and sprawling down the path; there was an air of exhaustion and depression about most; they were all still drunk.

For a long five minutes no one had come out of the

door and down the path, and we sat, our eyes fixed on the door watching and wondering if all were gone, when suddenly as if he had been thrown out by force, wild and angry—the fiddler. He ran among the long grass on one side of the path and then the other, calling loudly, using his hands like a trumpet: "Effie Gallows! Effie Gallows, where are you?"

We stayed very quietly and he didn't see us; then later when he had given up, and he and the two other fiddlers had marched down the path together, we were relieved and stood up with pain, for we were cramped. At the same minute Ernest Weir stood swaying in the doorway. He saw us and called weakly: "Effie!"

Then Effie said quietly to me: "I'll go now."

So I watched her climb the path slowly and strongly. As she neared the door Ernest did not wait for her but went in. Her foot is on the stairs and now the door is closed, and with never a look back.

I bent and plucked from among the grass a little daisy; it was closed tightly and firmly, as a spider plays dead. I looked at the little creature solemnly, lying in the palm of my hand, then of a sudden closing my fingers roughly around it, I chanted out, half in joy, half in pain: "You're my flower . . . you belong to me . . . you can never leave me . . . all my life." Then I placed it tenderly in my purse and went home, feeling not as lonely as I might have felt.

In Durkie words of slander and cruelty flew like darts from mouth to mouth. There wasn't a man, woman, or child who had not some original idea or sly suggestion to whisper about Effie and her wedding. For three days now the whole village has been busy with scandal. Mistress Weir had naturally been told, with all details, the goings-on that took place after she left the wedding. Without stopping her knitting nor looking up, she had bitten her thin vein of a lip between her teeth and shaken her head darkly and ominously.

"Your son is a good man, Mistress Weir," they said, "but he's made a sad mistake, and I wonder if she'll be ashamed to face us all." They would turn their heads and narrow their eyes to peer at the Grey House, maybe to catch a look at Effie, but she was nowhere to be seen. "She's keeping to the house," they said, "and well she might."

Go through any man's backyard in Durkie, climb the wall, and look half a mile to the left. In the west, there's a slight hill covered with many fir-trees, circled by a clear, strong burn; rowan-trees at its edge, and many wild flowers, the kind that likes water; the fish in the burn are grown fat, for no one fishes them, and here, on the bank of that happy burn, where the

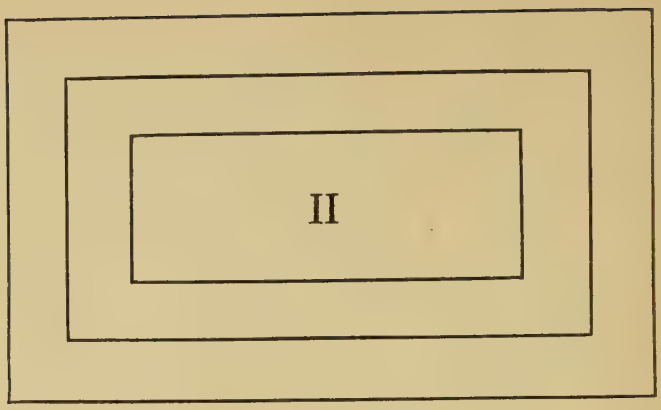
trees thin a little, have pitched their tents the three fiddlers. It's their lean horse that clips the grass and stirs the waters when she drinks. All day long a fire smoulders that at night breaks into flame; then there's fiddling and singing, and the sound of the once smug fat fish burning in the pan.

And the folk of Durkie ask each other what they have done to have this happen, and they say: "It's her fault; it's because of her, for he knew her father." And when the fiddler swaggers through the village they watch him cannily to see that he doesn't take the road that leads to the Grey House, for that's what they are waiting for, one and all.

I teach my school, day in and day out, and nothing much happens. The village is quieting down again; it's a week now since Effie's wedding, and although she has not come to the village, Ernest has. At first, he was treated with suspicious respect and watched narrowly, but now they are used to him again; and, after all, he is a village lad, and was always one of them, not like Effie.

They are now almost used to the fiddlers; in fact, something of pride is taken in their playing. "That was right braw music last night" and "Durkie will miss them when they go." So all is peace, and the

days are mild, and clear, and when it rains the rain feels warm, for it is full summer, and school will be out next week, which is a blessing for I feel the need of a rest.



II

AND now you find me perched high on my teacher's stool overlooking row on row of, for the most part, stupid, round faces. Eyes are agleg and hair plaited down, clothes are clean, for it's the first day of school after the holidays and everyone feels gay and important. The summer is in its death, frowzy and destitute, like a worn old whore. It is the end of August; by this time next month Summer will be dead and buried, though for many weeks her old worn clothes will clutter up the ground, the rags of old dead Summer. Then the frost will come and the ground will harden; the snow will fall in heavy flakes, covering all and destroying all signs of our poor old friend. So it goes, naturally, but I am a little too quick, for the

old witch is still alive and still holds her brawls up and down the countryside.

I always feel when I start school again after the holidays that I am beginning life anew; there's no truth in it of course, but I am fresh and eager and excited, and as I look on the rows of young, silly faces, I feel like a little minor god who has been appointed to teach them of this strange place, the world, they find themselves in—a dangerous idea you'll say, but not truly so, for I know this to be only a feeling and to have no foundation in fact. I know that all I can teach they must forget before they will ever know anything at all—all the kings and queens and the saints and the ships must go by the board, for two and two are four—not only in arithmetic—and if you love a woman and she won't love you, knowing of fair Queen Mary will teach you no new tricks.

I saw our Effie once only, and that from a distance. She was carrying a small bundle and seemed to be going somewhere definite; since then I've never seen her again, in spite of the fact that I have walked a great deal about the countryside and have passed her gate often. I am torn in two ways, one to see her and talk with her again, the other a desire to avoid any meeting. I am afraid she may have changed, or tamed, or even become a stranger, and then, I am by nature timid and am afraid of appearing self-conscious before her.

The whole village is busy about the coming fair, which is held every year in a large-sized field called Govan field. In a few days now, if you look up or down the Durkie road, you will see many fine sights, clear-eyed, glossy cattle and lambs washed white as snow, romanies in caravans to tell your fortune, and tinkers to mend your pots and pans, strong men, and men to make you strong, the woman with the tupenny pies, and the buxom girl who sells whelks, whom the lads all wink to each other about. All come from God knows where; for two days they will come straggling over the hill leading their cattle and bent under their loads. They'll pitch their tents in the field, and set up their stalls, and prepare gaily and recklessly to rob the town, Durkie will lose its head and go mad for two whole days. For the farmers, of course, it's a more serious thing; they have large overgrown cabbages and turnips and enormous bulls, to say nothing of hens that look as big and solid as any swan, and there are prizes to be won, and horses to race, and some of the farmers are fist fighters and are out to make money and a name, but even so, the apparent severity of the farmers is only on the surface; they are only holding in till the judging is over, and if they lose, they have a good excuse to get drunk, and if they win, a still better one.

I am going to have tea with the minister, at the minister's bidding. I am surprised that he should have asked me, since I drop in on him at odd times, but perhaps he has something important to say that cannot wait. I have grown very fond of the minister lately. He is fond of walking, as I am, and we have walked the countryside together, there's a particular charm about him, very hard to put your finger on. He has a way when he is with you of delivering himself up to you; it might be called a weakness almost, his ability to share your feelings and to understand your thoughts. He is over-eager in appreciation, but there's no false humility about it, and it's not on account of his being a minister, and trying to win you over by making an example of himself; he simply can't help himself. If I were to say: "I wonder how many miles it is from Syracuse to Alexandria," he would spend tense excited hours finding out by book and map; then when he had found it, he would come half running with pleasure, and in a happy excited voice tell me his finding. For me he is a fine companion, so I am very happy in my walks with the minister, and find him easy to confide in, something I have never felt I could do before.

He keeps a fine garden full of straight simple flowers. They are well kept and well groomed, and look healthy and insolent, and I think that if you knew the minister

you could tell that this was his garden, for by his passion for losing himself in whatever he does, and his ability to turn his energy into the thing that he is at work on, he has created a garden of flowers that is as personal and as individual almost as people; every leaf and every stem, every fold of a petal is doing what it ought to do and looking as it ought to look, in the plant's way and not twisted to the desire of the man who planted it, and as I bend now and touch the head of some flower, I could not, for the world, pull it off and stick it in my buttonhole, as I often do—I would feel like a murderer almost, and also, I know the minister would look on me askance, feeling perhaps that wearing a flower from his garden was as heartless as if I were wearing on my coat the minister's left ear. All this may sound far-fetched to you, but that's how it is, and I know that if you were here in his garden with me this minute, you would feel the same. He never cuts the flowers himself until they die; in his house he has no flowers in jars, and when he walks in his garden among them it is just as though he were among folks, and he treats them all differently according to their kind, for he knows and understands their differences, a thing most people know nothing of.

We talked on many subjects, life in Edinburgh, what France must be like—the minister has a great feeling for France and would like one day to go there.

"Of course the French are not as religious as the Scotch," he smiles, "but if people are happy, there is no need of religion."

"But if you believe!" I cried.

"Well, what of it? You have to believe everything; even a lack of belief is a belief in itself; believing anything is the easiest thing for a man to do."

"But there are some things that are against one's nature to believe."

"Yes, but even so, if you are caught in the beginning you can be taught to believe. After all, belief is only being used to a thing."

"But people do sometimes form their own beliefs," said I.

"Only if the belief was not well enough taught. And what do they do anyhow? They run from one belief to another one that is just as complete. I tell you that between what you believe, and what the Catholic believes there isn't a particle of difference; it's the belief that counts, and that's but a habit."

"But it's easier for some kind of people to believe certain things than it is for others."

"Aye, that's so, but then no man's, or rather, few men's belief is perfect; there are degrees—you look up in the sky and you see a star and you say to yourself, that's a 'star' but that's only a word you're using—"

"It's true," I interrupted, "that words are not the

thing itself, naturally; but when you say that 'star' is only a sound, that's true, but it's the sound we use to identify a certain thing that—"

"Yes, but you see we believe in the star as a word, and between you and the thing as it truly is, there is a mist, and the mist is the sound we have given the thing; it's the sound we believe in, not the thing itself. Mind you, it's all right when we are dealing with things that we know about actually, like this table." And he tapped the table gently with his finger tips. "This is easy; but there are things in life that we know nothing of, really, terrible things if you think of them, like a 'star'—the 'sun,' the 'moon'—all monsters—and yet the three things made most of sentimentally. The more grand and terrific are things, the sweeter the sound we tag on to them, to describe them; and it's so with everything we know." He sat silent for a while looking gently disturbed; then firmly: "I know no facts in life. I know no sin."

"Sin," said I, "is only the breaking of the laws that are laid down in your country; they are made in the first place for the comfort of most people, and the world after all is but your own house enlarged."

"Aye, that's right! But I tell you, you may know the country you live in, but no man knows what the world is; and how can you break its laws, when you don't know what its laws are?"

"So it is," I said, and we smiled at each other mysteriously.

At this minute tea came, and we drank thoughtfully. I was a little surprised at the minister, for I never had thought of him as a man concerned about such things, but had looked on him as one well content to be as he is and where he found himself. I would have liked to ask him why it was he chose to be a minister, but I thought that a bit forward, and it might imply a criticism of him as a minister, so I hesitated; but perhaps at another time—Then my thoughts were caught by something that he was saying.

"I have to make a visit," he was saying, "and I thought maybe you would go with me!"

I looked at him in some surprise, for the tone of his voice seemed restrained. "It's Effie Gallows," he said.

"Oh, so that's it. Effie Gallows!" Why do I have to go with him to Effie Gallows? I grew suddenly mean inside. I suppose, I thought to myself, he knows how I like her, and he thinks he is doing me a kindness; but aloud I said: "You know her name is Weir now."

"That's so," he said. "But somehow I never think of her with that name. Effie Gallows is much better."

"Have you seen her lately?" I asked.

"No, but once from a distance. You know, John, her wedding made a great impression on me. I have even dreamed about it once or twice."

I was startled at this.

"I have a feeling that we are all waiting for something to happen. It seems a stupid thing to say, but I have felt sometimes very tempted to pray for her. So"—he smiled shyly at me—"Will you come with me and back me up? For apart from all this Effie Gallows is a woman that somehow makes me feel more useless than even I am."

So I agreed to go and said: "When would you like to go?"

"I thought tomorrow would be all right," he said, "about five o'clock."

So he had thought it all out, had he, down to the very hour? Well, I'd like to go myself, and I never would have gone alone. But I wonder if he knows that I want very much to go. He looks so innocent of guile, and yet he is a very clever man. No, that's not true, not a clever man but a wise and thoughtful one. He is innocent of guile and he is truthful and simple; if he knew about my feeling for Effie he would probably have said: "I knew that you would like to come, and that's why I am asking you."

You will think to yourself now that I am a coward, afraid to face the fact of my love being known—it's not that; if it were to do Effiie good I wouldn't mind who knew, but I know too well that this would be but an added stick to the fire of their hate, and then I have

to live too, and it's hard enough to get by as it is, without being thought different from the average. It's true that I am not counted quite the same as the average village lad, for after all I have been to Edinburgh, and got educated there, and all this is fitting since I am the school teacher, and if they recognize the fact that I am a little different, it's because I am the school teacher, and that makes it all right. But, once let me overstep their conviction of what a school teacher ought to be, or how he ought to behave, and they would have me out overnight. You see, it's my great weakness that I have to depend on Durkie for a living. Now with Effie it's different—she is free inasmuch as she has independent means; but even so, if they haven't the power to turn her out overnight, they can make things so hurtful for her that, if she has any spirit left, she will pack of her own free will and go; or else she must try and live as I do, controlling my tongue and even my thoughts and agreeing with their ways, no matter how wicked they seem. It's a poor shabby way to live, but even if I were to have a sneaking admiration for one who tried to live against it I would never think it wise, nor anything but foolish.

"I will see you tomorrow."

So it's agreed that I will call for the minister around four-thirty, since it's quite a walk, and together set out for Effie's. We shook hands a little solemnly, the min-

ister took me down to the gate, and with his hand on the latch, he turned his eyes back over his garden, and to my horror said softly: "We might take her some flowers."

It was pouring rain next day when I set off to fetch the minister, there wasn't a crack in the heavy wet cloud that was hung like a grey shawl in the sky, so low it touched the tree tops and hid completely the back hills. The roads were running red with mud, and not a bird chirped or moved. It's a fine day to go calling, I thought, but I knew we would go just the same.

The minister was seated, bending over, lacing his boots, when I went in. He looked nervous and distraught, like a man preparing for some task.

"You would think," he said, pointing out of the window, "that the judgment day had come."

Well, here we are at Effie's gate, both of us drenched to the skin. Now we are making the hill, and now we are sadly and self-consciously standing, with our eyes on the ground, for I had knocked on the door. Effie answered it herself, and looked at us curiously from one to the other.

"We've come to make a visit," said the minister timidly.

Effie smiled one of her rare smiles. "You have picked a fine day for it!"

She made us take off our boots that were wet and she put them in the oven; we sat on either side of the kitchen fire, the steam rising like mist from our trouser legs. Effie noisily set about to make the tea, lifting the heavy iron kettle up and hanging it on the crane, raking the fire, rattling cups and saucers, talking meanwhile in between.

"Why did you bring me flowers, Minister?" She was putting them carefully one by one in a jug of water.

"I thought sure you would like them," he said.

"I like them all right." Then she looked from the flowers to him. "You must be a very kind man." She said this as if she had never considered him really as a person before, and I felt uneasy, for it seemed to me that her remark might hurt the minister's feelings; but no, for he was smiling away, and you might have thought that she had paid him the highest kind of a compliment.

We had had our tea and we were warm and comfortable. The fire blazed mis-shapenly and every object in the room that you could see had a dark shadow, for the lamps were not lit. Effie was telling us a strange

tale of her father; her voice was tense and deep and often she grew hoarse with excitement. She seemed to lose herself in it completely, and we for our part sat lost in her. She took us violently into her confidence; she included us in her admiration of her father, taking for granted that we understood as well as she, pointing a finger stiff with concentration at the minister, who, you must know, never even saw her father, and saying: "You should have seen the way he looked," and: "You know as well as I do how he felt." And the minister, in his element, soared like a golden swallow in the timeless, placeless, windless arc created by her absorption.

"Twice around the rock he sailed, and twice he rowed ashore and touched the rock with his hands, and rowed back aboard his boat again, and set sail for home; then spread the word far and wide that a new rock of land had been found that was not charted and had never been seen before, and then setting out again to claim his land and sailing night and day for many days, but never a rock to be found; then coming home wild with rage—and standing in the doorway and looking like a madman, and shouting out: 'I am leaving the sea forever, for it's not ripe for man. It has a claim on my mind if I do not.'

"Then he fell in a faint, the big heavy man, as if he were a weak woman, and I carried him to his bed, and

I doused his brow with cold water. It was all of an hour till he opened his eyes and smiled and felt better and got up, but never once did he mention his land of rock or his search for it, and never did I, and to this day I do believe that when he fainted and awoke, the idea completely left his mind, except that he never sailed again, and never gave a reason for it."

"And did you never speak of it?" I asked in wonder.

"Not once," she answered. "He never would have forgiven me had I broken into his silence about this. We always left each other alone—our thoughts, I mean."

"But were you curious?" I asked.

"Yes, of course, very often, but his telling me wouldn't have belonged to his nature, and I think I would have been more curious if he had told. You see he was a man like that, he never voiced his convictions —they were finished things—only his doubts. I knew another man like that once." As she spoke her voice grew soft. "He was just the same. I remember I went with him to the fair once and there was a man who tempted men to fight him for a prize. I wanted him to fight but he would not. 'I could beat that man easy,' he said, for he was wondrously strong. 'I'll wait till there's one I have a doubt of.' And one was put up that was bigger and stronger, and he fought with him and got badly hurt, and lost, but he seemed to

have no sore feelings and his pride didn't worry him, and as I washed the blood from his cheek with my handkerchief, he laughed and said: 'It's always like that with me: the things I can do, I won't do, for they are too easy; and the things I can't do I will do, but they are too hard.' He was just the same as my father, if my father couldn't find the rock he would not sail the sea."

I was very curious about this man, for I think he was the one I told you of who came from Paisley, but I was hurt and felt that I couldn't ask her about him with ease. I was jealous of his strength and his looks, for I remember him as very fine-looking, and then her talking of him; and the softness of her face as she talked of him, and the fact that she compared him to her father whom I knew she admired above anyone else, all showed me clearly how she must feel for this stranger, or at least she had felt for him; but even so in spite of myself, I knew I had to know more about him, so with an attempt at lightness, I said:

"He must—your friend, I mean—have been an unusual man. Did you say he was a friend of your father's? Was he an old man like your father?"

It was pitiful, and I knew how ridiculous I must seem. It must have been plain to anyone that I was asking the things about him that I hoped he was, and of course Effie knew that and the full extent of my little jealousy, so she smiled at me brightly and cruelly.

Then first having destroyed what calm I had left by looking straight into my eyes with her eyes, till I had to lower mine, slowly and delicately she set out to mock me.

"Let me see," she said softly. "Oh, yes, he was very old and grey and bent, and his eyes? They were crossed, and specked with white like all old men's eyes. I think he knew my father's father; anyhow he taught me how to play peever, and to cuddle for trout, and to tell a plover from a sparrow, and of course I loved him to death. Is that what you want to know? Naturally, I loved this nice old man, and I always will, and, if you like, when he dies, you can come with me and dance at his funeral—"

I sat cringing miserably. How long she would have gone on like this I cannot say—I had no power to stop her. It was the minister, sitting quietly listening, surprise marking his mild face, who stopped her.

"Effie Gallows," he said, "why do you torment my friend?" I looked at him gratefully. "What has he done to you that you treat him like this? He seemed to me to ask you a proper question. I cannot understand why you should turn on him so." The last word was pitched high and given the intonation of a question. I looked on Effie fearfully, for it was the first time that I had ever seen her chided and what I expected I don't know, but what I got was certainly fair, and surprised me

greatly, for she suddenly smiled humbly and reached out her hand and touched my hand. Then she said simply,

"You will please forgive me; I am very sorry. I have no right to act like this—I don't know what got into me. And Minister too"—she turned and smiled toward him—"he will please forgive, and believe me when I thank him sincerely for having chided me."

Never was such sweetness. Never have I seen Effie Gallows in this way before. It was something that you could not resist, such graciousness, such charming gentle humility. We sat, the minister and I, stupefied with admiration, rosy and dumb, both of us too charmed to speak, and it was in this gentle state that Ernest Weir surprised us. He must have come in by a door somewhere, but we did not hear him, I turned my head as one does when one unconsciously feels that someone is in the room who was not there before, and there in the dark I could see his pale face hovering in the doorway. He came in and shook hands and sat down, but I knew instinctively that if I had not seen him he would have slipped out or gone upstairs, without coming in, and I felt uncomfortable, for his manner was stiff. Also, I was shocked by his appearance, for he looked thin and haggard. He refused tea, and sat stiffly looking into the fire.

Effie had started to tidy up the dishes; there was a

general feeling that our visit was over, and I sat self-consciously wondering what to say and how to get away. Effie lit the lamp. "Does it still rain?" she said to Ernest.

"No," he said.

"That's fine," said Effie, lifting our boots from the oven. "You won't get wet on the road back."

Here was our chance, so we pulled on our boots and up we got. Ernest saw us to the door.

"You must come again," he said vaguely.

We had been uncomfortable and self-conscious, and we were glad to be out on the hill walking silently together.

The sky was hung with faint stars that strengthened and weakened, and stayed or went. The trees were dripping large clear drops of water. The grass smelt fresh and crisp and we walked on silently between the hawthorn hedges that smelt like sweet nuts, then out across rolling fields that were scattered with round pungent clean-smelling heaps of cow-dung, over stiles, and across a swollen stream that in the dark seemed as vicious and noiseful as the sea, and all in silence. Then at the minister's gate we shook hands, and he cleared his throat, and said: "Good-bye, and thank you."

"Good-bye," I answered.

Then the gate clicked, and then the crunching of the gravel under his foot, then the soft slam of the front

door, and I was in the quiet I wanted to be in. I was strangely tired and happy and worried all in one, and wanted to be alone, not to think but to feel; so I went my way home quietly and took comfort in the quietness, and since the earth was tired after the rain and in a state of happy sorrow like myself, I felt like part of it and drew great peace from it, and I felt when I lay down to sleep that night, that I laid my head, not on a pillow, but on a warm cloudy breast, that somehow needed my comfort as much as I needed hers.

III

TAKE the tinkle of bells, the lowing of many cattle, the crowing of strong-throated cocks, the bleating of the homesick lamb, sick for the steep hill and the stubble and the hard rock under his little arched foot, flowers past their freshness, coloured ribbons, and the dirty hands of the farmers stroking the thighs of the horses, and looking with small, red eyes of lust on the strange women from other towns, and you have the fair. The pig in his pen with his nose to the ground, his kindly, understanding eyes darting here and there in sensitive fear, never looking straight at his tormentors, nor avoiding with his hulk the prodding stick. Oh, gentle, kindly animal, of all the tortured creatures in the world my heart suffers most for you, you are like a

symbol of a whole tragic existence, the birth, the belly, and the grave. You were born for your size, bought for your size, and slaughtered for your size. All compliment is taken from you, you are allowed no graceful play at forgetfulness, you are treated always to the bare facts of your meaning. You are by virtue of your size given a great hunger, which in its place forces a greater size and a greater hunger, moulding your poor heavy body day by day to the butcher's knife. Oh, I have heard a pig scream in his death agony, I have heard a man, and I know which is the finer. Look some day in a pig's eye, look honestly, and you will see a human eye, but more sensitive and more aware of his doom than most men, and more tolerant of his murderers.

The grass is dead underfoot, grey and slippery, beaten down by the many feet; there's a merry-go-round of wooden horses; there are swings that go sky-high, shaped like little boats; a man wearing dirty pink tights, and a haunted expression, can swallow a sword and eat fire; beating of drums, blaring of brass trumpets, the crying of the animals, the loud insolent acclamations of the showmen, and the lewd laugh of the lascivious milkmaid. Mix all these in distorted rhythm and you have in its essence the fair, Durkie Fair, the much looked-for event of the whole year, the flower after a year of striving, the farmers' feast of

Bacchus, the three days of grace, when man is allowed to show a vulgar pride in his accomplishments, when his harvest is put in the shop window. For what a man is worth in the fair he is worth in life, and the fatter and firmer the animals he has to talk for him, the greater and finer a man he is for the next year, at least. So you see, this fair is the synthesis of man's life, the one real moment of his worldly striving, his trial for his life, and you can understand that all the human passions are heightened and excited, pride and boasting, weakness and strength, cruelty and filth all enhanced and given freedom by virtue of each man's sense of importance. Oh, it's a sad, shoddy sight which I can never grow accustomed to, this taking of several hundred souls and by some miracle making them play out their lives from beginning to end in three days, for between the ropes that mark the fair's boundary is contained everything from every angle that makes up the lives of the people. It's all tragic, the pig in his pen, and man at his fair.

When one sees people in a mass one is more prone to philosophize about life, but when one looks on one man at a time and considers one man at a time, one grows confused and enchanted, and even the simplest seem very strange and complicated, and one gets lost in what seems like a labyrinth of contradictory emotions. Here is a man, a young man, talking to me. If I

said that I could understand or contemplate men as a whole, as I look at this man who is talking wildly to me, and throwing his head back like a god, and whose smile is like a flash of lightning, can I do anything but go on my knees and beg to be forgiven my simple-minded insolence? For I am talking to Effie's man, Effie's strong foolish man. I knew him the minute I saw him, and I went up to him and told him my name, and said I knew him. While he talks to me his eyes roam the fair grounds; they settle first on one dim woman and then another, dismissing them with a turn of his head, for they are not the woman he seeks. Oh, I know it all; why he's here; I know how white she'll turn when first she sees him; I am sickened by all this knowledge, and weary of feeling, but I'll stick to the end. I'll watch and feel and understand, for I am powerless to do anything else. These are my pick of people, not so much by my weakness as by their strength. Effie did not come to the fair that day, nor Ernest, but there are two more days to go, and she will surely come.

That night I danced with Nettie Malloch on the grass with the rest, but I watched for Effie stealthily and carefully as I danced; and among the white faces that made a circled wall around the dancers, I could see his face strained and watchful.

The road is thick with people going to the fair, they look like an army broken up, marching loosely.

It's a fine day, and in between the trees, the gathering rooks make a black pattern on the blue sky.

Minister and I are going to the fair together, we walk abreast a mite faster than most others, and pass many, and the doing of it gives one the feeling of being drawn in a cart. I touch my bonnet every few minutes, for I know most of the townsfolk. All are cheerful and kindly disposed, so we march down an aisle of gay salutations. "How do, Minister?" "How be Mr. John?" and: "It's turned out a fine day," "Good luck to you, Farmer Meikle," and when we pass one whose name the minister does not know, he sings out, "Good day, friend," and the farmer, or whoever it is, smiles a little grimly at that, for it is a wee bit light for Scotland. But for the most part it's all very fine; this fine clear day, the strong happy people, the dogs that run in couples, weaving in and out between the walking people, scraping under hedges, and appearing again further up the road, standing with their tongues hanging out and their sides almost meeting for want of breath, waiting for their masters to catch up, taking no heed of any other.

"Hey, you two!" We turn like two soldiers given

the command. "Who is chasing you? The Deil? Or are you on your way to heaven? Slow down a wee and I'll lend you my company."

Of course it's the fiddler—who else would talk like that? So the three of us laugh and shake hands and march on together. "I made ten shillings yesterday; if this keeps up I'll own the town."

"That's more than we ever get in the plate," says the minister with mock sadness.

"And why not?" Fiddler shouts back. "Don't I give them something for their money? Get me to play in your kirk and I'll draw the money from them. I'll give them something to pay for, and you won't have to hire me, neither. I'll go halves with you. We'll play them into a happy daze, and then we'll go through their pockets. You don't like that?"—for the minister had winced, not because he took it so seriously, but because of the picture it presented, I think.

"No," said the minister a bit severely. "I always feel bad about having to pass the plate at all."

"But if it was piled high, Minister? What then? Would you feel so bad then?"

"I'd feel a sight worse."

"Then you're a queer man, Minister, a queer distorted man, and you think too much of money, and not enough of God." He seemed fierce and vindictive, and the minister was angry, although he did

not show it, but smiled quietly and said in a still voice:

"You describe us both I think."

This so enraged the Fiddler that he swung off without a word, and we made no attempt to stop him, but for the next half-mile he played behind us as he walked, and his music mocked us. "He is a very fine fiddler," said the minister, "and although I know him for a rogue I can't help but admire him."

"Aye, he's the kind of character one reads about," I said.

So he was dismissed, and we walked on happy again, and now we could hear faintly the tinny noise of the fair, my excitement grew and I could hardly wait to get there, to see if Effie and Effie's young man would be there also and meet, and to watch and read what was written on their faces when they did. Louder and louder came the tinkle of the fair so that no one noise could be plucked from another.

It was the day of the horse-racing and there was much betting and argument going on, and the horses who were not trained for this business were excited and almost as often on two legs as four. We hung over the fence that marked the course, and watched them run, a fine exciting sight. Minister was excited like a boy; his whole face was lit up with smiles and his eyes danced. Then we went off to look at the strong man

who was lifting great weights. It took him about ten minutes of preparing, bending his legs, throwing out his chest, then forcing the muscles of his arms, closing his eyes for a time, then jumping up straight, with a swiftness that startled you. Then spitting in between his hands and glaring ferociously at the crowd, with a look that said plainly: "This time or never," he plunged, or you might say he swooped down on the black and utterly defenceless weight, and, grabbing it with his two red hands, he slowly, dramatically, powerfully tugged on the weight, which by now you had come to regard with great respect and awe. Another great breath and the thing started to rise. It looked unnatural, as if it belonged wholly to the ground, and my feeling of respect for it was diminished somewhat. Higher and higher it was forced; it was no mean trick, for the strong man was giving his whole intensity to it; he seemed to grow shorter and squarer the higher the weight rose, till he looked almost as if he were standing in two holes, his skin had become an unhealthy red colour, and the principal veins embedded in the flesh of his arms looked as big and as hard as the stem of nettles. At last it was up, held with one hand high. His whole body trembled, a streak of oily black hair fell over his eyes, but he dared not risk putting it aside. The crowd was breathless and awe-stricken. . . . At last with one terrific effort he threw

it off, and it landed on the grass with a dull thud. The crowd rushed at him, shook his hand, pinched his round muscles; the more sceptical meanwhile were bent in two over the weight, tugging and pulling, but the iron had captured again its old dignity and sat immovable as a skerry in a calm heavy sea. The grass around the strong man was dotted with coppers, thrown respectfully. He kept them all well under the control of his eyes, waiting for the fitting time to come when he could risk his glamour by stooping down to pick them up.

Further on they were throwing the javil, and this is a sight I have always liked, for it has great strength and grace in one. Four of them were at it, stripped to the waist and wet with sweat, their kilts creased back and forth as they moved like the quick shutting and opening of a paper fan. A bell was being rung to announce that a box fight was about to begin, so there was a rush in that direction, and Minister and I were half pushed, half drawn along. I have never taken to box fighting much, being a physical coward myself, or rather I'll say, being very sensitive to pain. It almost hurts me to see anyone else hurt; but if a fight is bloody enough I am held there against my will almost by horror. I don't think Minister had ever seen a fight like this, for he stood as if he were a simple child, astonished and inquisitive, and as the crowd grew ex-

cited and coarse wild sounds began to fly about, he looked around with shocked interest. It was not a good fight, this one and very one-sided, for one man was no match for the other, and when the weaker at last lay on the grass, his head buried in his arm like a man lost in sleep, his friends broke through and carried him off while the crowd jeered. Now the winner sat on a stool to wait for the money he had won, and the crowd one by one sat on the grass where they had stood to wait for the next fight. A girl, stepping high amongst us, selling bannocks, was the object of much chaff; they pinched at her leg, and tugged at her skirt, but she had a brazen face and wasn't in the least put out, but stepped all the higher and ventured into still tighter places, singing out: "A bannock a bawbee!" "A bannock a bawbee!"

I looked on the medley of faces to find one I knew, and thus far saw none; but when the second fight was on, my eyes fell on the proud head of Effie's friend. He caught my eye at the same time, and without a smile or a moment lost, he came striding over the crowd towards us and sat down with a nod of his head, but not a word of greeting. My heart was fair pounding, but I think I looked calm enough and I lost interest in the fight in studying his face, of course without his awareness, which was easy enough, for he was keen on the fight.

His face is hard to picture, being of a uniformity that is neither arresting nor yet ordinary. His fine looks come, it seems to me, not so much from his features as through the spacing of them. He has a bold look and yet at the same time grave; in other words he hangs more for beauty on expression than feature, although his features are all that any man could wish. His hair, and I am throng to admit it, is a true clear gold, and he has a great mass of it. The eyes are grey, but not of any largeness; the mouth and chin are on the whole too heavy, though sensitive. He is tall and square and well proportioned. It's enough for any man to be proud of and I admit easily my envy of him on that score. What kind of brain he has, I cannot say, for in the only talk I have had with him he struck me as proud and stubborn, and any man who is proud in an intellectual way I am tempted to think dull-witted. Now, instead of talking to me of what he wanted to talk, of Effie, he beat about the bush. It is true that had I been in his shoes I would have done the same, although I could have hidden it more, but I am not the man he is, nor hung with the trappings of strength like him, so in a way my pride is appeased a little, for I feel that without any of his gifts I am as much a man as he.

"Who is this fine strapping lad?" says the minister in my ear.

"It is the one Effie told us of," I said in a cool voice, "the one that's like her father."

"Oh," said he softly, and again: "Oh." I could see that he was aroused too, and his mild eyes wandered as often as mine to rest on the heavy gold-crowned face.

Another man was laid on the grass, blood trickling from the corners of his mouth. The crowd relaxed with a sigh, for it had been a hard fight. Effie's man stood up and looking down on us from his height, said: "It was a fair fight!" Then, with a turn of his shoulders he was gone.

The minister and I looked at each other. "He is a queer one," he said, "and something is on his mind; the man looked possessed. Why did he come by us since he left without a word? He is not of Durkie, is he? I never saw him before. How did you come to know him? I thought—you asked Effie Gallows if he were an old man. Does she know he is here?"

"I doubt it," I said.

"Oh, I see!" He looked at me sorrowfully and my face turned red. "Oh, I see!" he said again thoughtfully. "So that's how it is. You and Effie Gallows!"

"No," I cried, "that's not so."

"Aye, it is so, you cannot beflum me any longer. I am right sorry for all of you. And has this lad come here to find Effie Gallows? Does he know she's wed to Ernest Weir? Does Ernest Weir know him?"

To all these questions I could only shake my head and say: "I don't know."

"I do think," said Minister, "that you should tell Effie he is here—that is, if she does not know."

"I thought to find her at the fair," I said.

"Were you here yesterday?"

"Yes," I said.

"And she was not?"

"No!"

"But if not today, tomorrow maybe she will come." He said that as if I were saying it to myself. "Well, if I see her I'll tell you."

So here was another one to watch for Effie. "But I won't tell her of him?"

"Let them meet face to face," I said.

"Oh, I see," he said. "And we will watch?"

"Aye," I said, "that's it."

"I would rather tell her."

"No," I said shamefacedly. "Don't do that. I want to see them meet unawares—there's something that I want to find out." I was talking low and hanging my head with shame, for I was truly miserable, having to declare myself like this. "Oh, I see," he said once more, and I prayed to myself that it was the last time—as it was, for with one more searching look at my face, he put his hand kindly on my arm and said: "Let us walk about a bit. I am stiff all over." I was glad enough

to get up myself and, by moving, perhaps to change the subject. So we roamed around, but I felt the minister, like me, watching every face. We were hungry now and we went in search of the woman with the pies; we found her and were in the act of buying from her when the Fiddler caught me roughly.

"Why do you buy that trash? Come with me to my slade and I'll give you both a bowl of powsowdy." He took the pies firmly from our hands and threw them back in the basket. "What are your pies stuffed with, glam?" He roared in the pie woman's face and, tearing the kerchief from his neck, he wiped his hands delicately. "Shut your trap, auld witch; hoddle off or I'll beat the yelps out of you!"

But she was a woman of will and not a bit cowed and screamed back: "Lay your hands on me, you rowdy, and I'll tear every hair from your hassock of hair."

"You bitch, you dirty harlot; you sad, despicable, filthy old whore! You blot on the sun! You stinking festered old mother of the Deil's dozen!"

That was too much for her, and as she stood speechless, panting with rage, Fiddler threw his arm round my neck and tilting his head to Minister, laughed and said: "Come on, friends, let's go where the air's clean." We had no power but to go with him; in fact, it never seemed to strike him that we might not want to, and

he seemed to have forgotten altogether his words to the minister this morning.

"People like that," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the pie woman, "are a scourge on the earth. I am sore put out to have forced such a dirdum, but when a thing has to be done, it has to be done. Ye have to ravel at the likes of her."

We were there in no time, for Fiddler walked like a giant and there was nothing to do but keep up with him. We sat down on the grass by the burn side and watched him kindle his fire. It was a fine sight, deft and dainty, and in no time the flames were creening fresh and clear and happy to be. Stones were placed around in a circle, and the cauldron of soup dumped on them; he stirred it with a stick.

"Where's the rest of you?" I said, meaning the other two fiddlers.

"At the fair," he answered. "They'll have theirs when I get back."

He fetched a canny and dipped up water from the burn. "For tae," he said, and put it on to boil.

I was very happy, and glad I had come. I could see the minister was, too; his eyes were agleg. We had our soup out of wooden bowls. It was the finest soup I ever tasted. Fiddler drank with a great deal of noise, wiping his mouth on his coat sleeve between draughts, talking through it all.

"I canna thole a woman that talks rough; I like a woman to be strong, it's true, but at the same time gentle. The women hereabouts are all too independent. I havena seen twa I could get into exies about; now that's not enough, is it?" He looks earnestly from Minister to me.

"No, by God! Not by a long chance. A man in a country of flommicks is in a sad plight."

There was a faint crackle of twigs and the shadowy noise made by one walking through fallen leaves. We turned our heads all at once to see who it might be—it was Effie Gallows. The four of us looked at each other silently. Then Effie stopped at the sight of us as if to walk away, but of a sudden changed her mind and turned back. She walked with her eyes on the ground to where we sat. She glanced from me to the minister, and she said: "I came to see Fiddler, but it's nice to see you too."

"Would you like us to go?" I said.

"No, it makes no difference," she said, and sat on the grass like us.

"You are good friends to me like Fiddler?" This was put as a question almost, and by the looks of gratitude we gave her she was answered.

Fiddler ladled her a bowl of soup.

"Are you hungry?" he said.

"I always am," she said back, and smiled.

Fiddler was childishly delighted, triumphant and humble all in one, making tea with many gaudy gestures, yet respectful, yet overbearing; but under all I could see he was very, very curious, and although subtly he was able to give us the impression that this visit of Effie's was not the first by any chance, I knew that not to be true, for his underlying expression of astonishment betrayed him.

Minister was looking at Effie seriously and questioningly.

"Mistress Weir," he said timidly, "you look ill?"

"Aye," said Effie, "I am ill."

"Ill?" I said. "You ill?" That Effie could be ill!

"Aye," she said again, "that is, you might call it ill." Then she raised her fine head and by the movement of her eyes included all three of us. "I am with child," she said.

The three of us half started up, then sank down again. I was almost in a stupor; I couldn't grasp it yet. That Effie is going to have a child! Dear God, what a thought! To think of Effie day by day changing, growing mis-shapen, losing her quickness and her litheness, walking carefully and heavily! Maybe even her face will change, grow bloated, the lips heavy—she'll have the sodden contented look on her face that

women having children do; her breath will come thick and uneven. Och! It sickens me to think of it, and then to have to think of Effie as a divided being, Effie with a child, Effie's child, not Effie alone but Effie and her child. I dare say if it were to be my child and Effie's I wouldn't be feeling just this way; but no, even then it wouldn't seem right.

Fiddler had got up from the grass. He went over to Effie and was staring down on her with his mouth hanging open. Then of a sudden he bent over and pulled her up by the two hands, and closed her in his arms. Then he threw his head back and poured out a stream of filthy oaths. He was in a rage such as I had never seen; then the swearing stopped and sayings of affection took their place. Effie let her head droop on his shoulder, not weakly, but more to be comfortable, and waited for him to stop.

"My sad lamb, my poor wee lamb, my poor headstrong girlie! What would your father have said?" He took her head solemnly between his hands and nodded sadly.

"Aye, that's a thought; What would your father have said to all this?"

Effie looked impatient. "My father," she said, "would have said very little, and you know it, Fiddler. So there's no need to harp on that."

But Fiddler took no notice, and went on raving.

"What got into you, Effie Gallows? What possessed you? Why didn't you mind that you were doing?" Then he let her go and turned on us dramatically. "What was I saying before she came? There's but one woman in this whole countryside that's worth a tinker's damn"—he pointed his finger fiercely at Effie—"and now look at her. There she is, and what a pass she's come to! Instead of being high, as she ought to be, she's low; she's fallen low—"

"But I can't see," interrupts the minister, "that it is such a crime to have a child; we were, after all, all children once, and as for myself—"

"There you go," Fiddler cut in on him, "up to your old tricks again, Minister, trying to make things nice. It's nice, is it, that our Effie's fallen low? Do you think the townsfolk will call it nice—"

"Fiddler! Fiddler!" And she stamps her foot. "Hold your peace! There's no need to rant; it's plain that Minister doesn't understand. You see"—she bends down to Minister, and spreading her hands in a kindly gesture towards him, she talks to him as if she were explaining something to a little child—"you see, Minister, this child of mine, will be born too soon; it's not a lawful child; it was conceived before my wedding. Now you know full well that that kind of thing is not well thought of around here."

"Nor anywhere else," roars Fiddler.

Effie threw him an angry look, but went on calm enough: "So you see, that is what Fiddler means when he says I am fallen low; he means in the thought of the village, not to myself." And she laid her hands flat on her breast.

"Aye, to yourself, you know it," said Fiddler.

"You're mistaken, Fiddler, not to myself." Her voice was cold but still, calm, by an effort.

"It seems to be a ticklish point to you, Effie. If you were sure about it, it seems to me it would mean less to you. After all, I am sure that, on the face of it, it's not what you would want exactly? You might as well be honest all the way through. You're in a bad way, one that no woman could want to be caught in—"

"Will you stop it!" cried Effie. She was white with rage, but not near crying, though her voice had a desperate tone to it, and I could tell only too easily that Fiddler was right, that this was a horrible thing that had happened to her, by her way of thinking, and that by it she had lost some respect for herself. Poor proud Effie, what a pass for her to come to!

Fiddler was instantly all softness, and wanting to make up to her for any hurt she might feel, so he mellowed his voice to a croon and went gently up to her, on his tiptoes almost.

"Effie, Effie, my lamb, I wouldna flaunt your predicament in your face. You know that! You know that,

Effie. And you know that you could have fifty bastards and I would always feel the same respect for you?"

"Keep quiet!" said Effie, cold as ice. "I am not interested in your respect for me, nor any others' neither. I came to talk to you, not because I wanted to be told how fine I was or how fallen I am. I live by myself. My child is mine, and how I came by it, and how I feel for it, and how I think of myself; they are all mine. I didn't come to talk of this; I came to ask you what I should do with myself; where I could go. I felt a need to get away from here. I thought perhaps I could go with you, if you would have it." She talked as if she were a wooden image, without any emotion, white and stiff.

Fiddler jumped at her and caught her hand and his eagerness and violence made her move, and she rocked as a wooden pillar might, if it were pushed and tottered. He was like a crazy man, overcome with excitement and enthusiasm. He leapt on her suggestion as a fact already decided, conjuring up fine pictures of the time to come, living through his imagination and already in the future. "Aye, that's it," he was saying. "You'll come with me—your father would want it. Oh, it'll be grand!" He started to walk back and forth, laughing and talking all in one. "Aye, that's it! You'll have your bairn and we'll take it along; aye, that's it, Effie."

He stopped in front of her and took her two hands by the wrists. "It's the kind of living you're fit for, there's no reason for the likes of you to rot in a place like this."

"But now I've changed my mind," said Effie. "I am not going with you."

Whether he heard or not I cannot say, for he was talking all the time and didn't pause or pay attention to her voice. He let her hands go and walked again back and forth, running his hands through his hair, talking with his eyes shut, snapping his fingers when a new idea struck him, turning brilliantly on Effie, running up to her, catching her by the arm, and shaking her with excitement. And she stood all through it, still wooden and unmoved, not hearing at all, but lost in her own thoughts, but now and then, through his fireworks of words and movements, I heard her say in her dead way: "I'll stay where I am!" Still, he didn't seem to hear, for he went on with his wild talking. "You've never been to England, have you? to London, Effie? We'll go to other lands. You've never been to Spain? to Spain, Effie?" And he whirls himself in a circle with his arms outstretched; then he threw himself on the ground at her feet and buried his face in her dress, chanting all the while: "We'll go to Spain, Effie, we'll go to Spain, you and me and the brat. I have friends there, and you'll wear a Castile comb in your hair, Effie—aye, and a white fillet shawl; and

they'll teach you how to dance, to dance Spanish. Aye—that's it," he said slowly, and was suddenly calm. "Aye, that's it," he said again, thinking hard. "Effie," he said, and he rose from his knees, "that's what we'll do. You'll dance and I'll play, and we'll make a lot of money; we'll get very rich."

Effie shook herself, and looked at him surprised, "What was that last thing you said?"

"I said we'll make lots of money; I said we'll get rich."

"Aye, and what will we do then?"

"We'll spend it like royalty," said Fiddler grandly.

We all smiled at his childishness and Effie's face softened a little. "It would be grand," she said, "but I am not going away."

"You're not going!" he roared at her. "You're not going! Then what are you going to do?"

"I am for staying here," said Effie.

Gone was his tenderness in a flash. He shook his fist, and shouted in her face: "You're mad, woman, if you stay here! You're mad and you're a fool."

"I canna help it," said Effie simply; "I canna run."

"Oh, good God!" says Fiddler, and he pulls at his hair with his hands. "If that isn't your father again! You canna run, you canna run! What made you suddenly think of that," he said suspiciously. "You're no fashed with me are you?"

"No, it's not that, it's that I had not quite realized what I would be doing, I hadn't thought it out enough; but I know now that I canna run."

He went close to her and said fiercely: "Let me tell you, Effie Gallows, that if you canna run, you'll be made to run. Aye, and you won't be able to run fast enough when the time comes." Then he was silent and hung his head in shame, for his threat had the turn of a prophecy, and he could see that Effie was frightened for a moment; so there was peace for a little, and then came Effie's voice, clear and calm like a bird's song, singing in the gloaming:

"It would be cruel to leave Ernest."

"That," said the minister, "is what's been striking me all the time. After all, a father has some rights, and surely he'll protect you some; it would be different if you were alone."

Fiddler, at this, rolled his eyes impatiently, and started his pacing about.

"You see, Minister," says Effie kindly to him, "this is not Ernest's child; it's someone else's child, and I don't even know how Ernest is likely to take it."

I could see that Minister was taken aback, and he looked at me in a comically helpless fashion.

"The dirty scoundrel," Fiddler was saying, half aloud, "the beast! If I could lay my hands on him, I'd tear the heart out of him."

"Oh, hush, will you!" says Effie impatiently. "He's no scoundrel. It takes two to have a child." Then she turned away wearily. "I am going now, for I am tired with so much wrangling—"

"I'll come with you and see you home," I said.

"No," she answered, "I would rather go by myself."

There was no insisting after that, so we stood up, and she gave me a little bow, and Fiddler, who was kicking a stone with his foot, sullenly, looked up and said:

"If you change your mind, Effie—"

"Mine's not the changing kind," she smiled back at him.

"No, God damn it!" he said sadly, half in sorrow, half in impatience.

She laughed softly at this, and was gone, lost in the trees; and the three of us stood, and listened to the twigs crackling and the leaves making their shadowy noises that they had made as she came. Then they fainted off, then ceased, and we knew her to be walking on the soft turf of the field and somehow felt more at ease.

IV

WHAT are my feelings after all; what do they count for in all this? I am torn this way and that, made sick by jealousy, weak by tenderness; my emotions are whipped into trouble, then betrayed and frustrated; they simmer down to futility and self-contempt, stagnant and unproductive, bringing neither peace nor creative disquiet—what a fool I am! What a sad sorry weak fool! Blinded by hurt, numb with disillusion, what do I do? What do I say? "This is not a creature I could love?" Oh, no! I look in horror and bravely say to my poor heavy heart: "Behold the creature I love; this is what she is like," and down I go on my knees and worship that which I know I despise, for that Effie could have so calmly made a

clown of Ernest Weir is something I find it almost impossible to forgive. How well she picked her man! Poor Ernest! Weak Ernest! Good Ernest! But not his mother—well I remember the look on his mother's face the night of the wedding. I felt sorry for his mother that night, but now I know that she was right, that what I took for jealousy was really understanding and hate, righteous hate. Fiddler is right; Effie had best go away, for Ernest's mother will turn the town against her when she learns the truth, and I don't see how she can help it.

But Durkie without Effie! I couldn't stand that; I feel dead at the thought—Durkie with the Grey House empty and the windows broken and Effie gone. . . . No, it's beyond thought; it's something not to be thought of, for Effie to go and finish her life out in some far-off part; it would be like cutting my own life off short.

Oh, but I am sick of myself and my inability to live as a complete man, sick to death and weary with it all!

"Would you mind," says the minister, "walking a bit faster? It's about to rain."

He's right. Up in the sky there are black fighting clouds; they look to be chasing us. "It was so fair

this morning," I said. Minister looked at me sharply. "It will be fair again tomorrow," he said softly.

I said nothing to this, but it struck me as very sad. Heavy sucking clots of rain were dropping listlessly, one by one. I tasted one that had fallen on my lip and it tasted sweet and warm. Then, of a sudden, the rain came down solid and automatically. Together we broke into a run and we smiled through the rain at each other, for we were old enough to feel self-conscious, about perhaps being seen in a run.

"Will you go to the fair tomorrow?"

"Aye," I answered back.

"What if it's raining?"

"I'll go just the same."

My gate was first. "Will you come in?" I said.

"Thank you, no." And still on the run he called out: "I'll see you then tomorrow?"

"Aye, tomorrow's morn," I called back.

He nodded his head to show he understood, and away he ran faster than when I had run with him.

Here we are again walking to the fair, two sad, worried men walking to the fair; the last day of the fair, and being the last day there is, like the last time of all things, a suggestion of sadness about it and a sense of relief.

I am very tired, having had no sleep to speak of. The road is covered with much the same crowd as yesterday, but the day is not so fine, still on the rainy side. I feel dejected and washed out and fit for nothing and Minister seems no better, and so together we are a wearied-looking pair. I feel half tempted to turn back and sit at home by myself; but I would only be nervous and curious and anxious to know who was at the fair. So what's the use! But one thing I know; I will not get mixed up with Fiddler. I feel I couldn't cope with his loud voice and large grasping hands that are always thumping you on the back, and his tense eyes that suck the energy from you. I couldn't stand it! I feel too nervous—if I see him I'll walk the other way.

But what's the use of taking an oath on what you'll do, or what you won't? For here he is, wild as ever, grabbing my arm with his strong dirty hands, and talking rapidly and fiercely in a voice that he tries hard to keep quiet.

"Who do you think I saw? Who do you think is here? You keep your eyes open; there will be something to see; I tell you that if Effie's at the fair, keep your eyes on her."

For God's sake! I thought. The man will drive me wild.

"Keep your eyes on me, too, but watch for Effie, stay by her, see!" And he tightens his grasp on my

arm to impress it on my mind, till I could call out for pain. "There's another there; there's a man—" As he said this he spat on the road. "There's a man! If you see him you tell me, I'll describe him to you, see—"

"You don't have to," I said pettishly; "I know all you know and more." In spite of my effort to keep calm, my voice rose.

"You know!" Fiddler shouts. "You know!" And he raps my chest hard with the back of his hand. "Then why in God's name didn't you tell me yesterday —did you see him yesterday? You talked with him!" He was dumbfounded. "You talked with him and you never told me a word." He dropped his hand from my arm in sheer astonishment, which was a blessing. "Why?" he roared.

"Listen," I said quietly, yet my temper rising. "We never once spoke together of Effie or of him. I never knew you knew Effie so well before yesterday. I only once heard you mention her father, and that was at her wedding, when you said you had known her father. I didn't know till you told me yesterday that you had seen her with a lad in Paisley and that you knew right off that they were lovers, that the lad was rich and well-known in Paisley and that he married someone else; that when you saw him with Effie his banns were up, that you didn't know who Effie was

till you met her at her wedding, that you knew her father, and you knew that it was his daughter's wedding you were to. But you didn't know it was Effie there!" I was in a rage by now. "How was I to know! I am no mind reader."

"But you might have told me yesterday," he yelled back. "I told you what I knew yesterday. Why did you not play fair with me?"

"I am no gossip!" I fairly screamed.

"And who said I was a gossip?" His tone was threatening and he came straight for me and gathering my coat in a lump in his strong hand, he pulled me slowly up to him till my face was but a few inches from his. His eyes were bloodshot and I could tell by that and his breath, that he was half drunk. "Who said I was a gossip?" he said again.

I felt sick, not with fear of a fight, but sick of the whole thing; and he struck me as a big blethering fool, and I was tired of his dramatics, and his whole personality had become nauseating to me . . . I felt I didn't care if he knocked me down, just so he took himself away in the end and left me in peace. So I turned my head wearily to one side, showing plainly by my expression the contempt I felt for him. This seemed to affect him curiously, for he dropped me like a red-hot poker and walked off in silence; but I had seen his face and he was hurt to the quick. I was

astonished, but too sickened to put any thought on it. I straightened the creases he had forced in my coat and Minister put his arm through mine by way of relief, I suppose.

"He's not the terrible fighter you might think he was," he said.

"And just as well, too," I replied, by way of humour. I felt suddenly light of heart again, and almost grateful to Fiddler for his behaviour, for somehow he had given me some respect for myself, and of that I was sore in need.

The fair seemed to have lost all reason for being to me. We walked among the happy moving people without catching any of their excitement, or sense of living. It's a curious feeling: one sees all that goes on and perfectly understands the emotions and desires that prompted certain sounds and incidents, but one gets no warmth from them; and when you supply nothing at all to the general expression, you get nothing from it. I suppose I am washed out and am playing dead, probably to protect myself from further feeling. I feel like a ghost—no, not even as definite as that; more like something not strong enough nor vivid enough to have had a name given it. It has a kind of lyrical thinness about it, this feeling that suggests sad-

ness without being sad. Does a blind man know any difference between being in a darkened room and being in a light one? I do not know, but I can describe a little my feeling when I say that I feel like a blind man in a whole world that is darkened—mind you, not the way a real blind man might feel, but the way I imagine I would feel if I were blind: to have all contrast taken from you in feeling, not in knowledge; to have the knowledge of difference but without the quality of emotional difference; to feel nothing, yet in the awareness of feeling nothing, still to feel nothing. It's not at all a good mood to be at the fair in, except, if you miss something of the pleasure, you also miss the horrors.

So there's Mistress Weir, twittering with suppressed excitement, so—she turns her back on me, pretends not to see me; she's thinking probably of the last time. Well, here I am, and I am going to talk to you; at least I am going to watch you as you talk to me. For some reason or other I want to hear you; I am like a man whose finger is numb with cold, and who can't help pressing it to see if he might by chance feel something.

When the slit of her thin mouth distorts itself by movement to make a gap for words to come through, I can almost count her teeth, which are long and green

at the roots where the gums have shortened on them. Two of them are very loose and rock gently as she talks; between them all are little gaps, and in and out, like the tide on a rocky shore, the frothy water comes and goes. Her neck is festooned with many veins which in the yellow of her cheeks scatter their tentacles, that in the intricacy of pattern and fluid quality of colour resemble a type of seaweed. Her eyes (and even in describing her eyes I feel no aesthetic revulsion) I can only describe as two pieces of dull gloss, living in two shapeless pools of weak blood; their expression is of the aching kind, at one time humble and arrogant. She must be very old, for the flesh of her face hangs draped on the bones, through which the purple veins sway and undulate, appearing and disappearing according to the movement given them. Her body is twisted and frail and seems to have no life of its own, but is like a tatter hung from her head.

You may wonder why I spend any effort in describing this creature to you; but this is a powerful person, strong and vicious, and into the bargain Effie's greatest enemy, and in the face of what has happened one to be taken into account. As she talks I cannot but realize that here is a warrior, perpetually bent on sharpening her tools of war, and of course, by my knowledge of Effie's troubles, an enemy who is about to receive a great stroke of good fortune in the fight

with her enemy. So I would be mad not to respect her strength.

But what is she saying? What meaning have the words that come limping through the rickety teeth? Nothing so far, not even the suggestion of anything so far—pleasantries about the weather, the fair, the price of cattle. Not a mention yet of what consumes her; she is waiting, cleverly, for the psychic moment to come when it will sound quite casual, when she can say easily: "I wonder if Ernest and his wife are at the fair,"—just like that. She'll watch me like a snake when I say back, just as easily: "I haven't seen them as yet," and in that moment she'll have thrown her first stone at Effie, and it will be up to me to join her in the stoning or move off in fear of hurt to myself. No one can fight her, for she has God on her side. So far she knows this only by instinct and craftiness; shortly she'll look on Effie's body and she'll count on her own wavering fingers, and then she will know that she is right in fact. Then, what a time of rejoicing! Up will go the banners on her battlements; how her armour will glisten in the sun, the righteous sun! There will be beating of drums, and the march of happy conquering feet. The Grey House will be conquered and destroyed, and the one who lives there had better run, if she cares, for her body will be violated and her integrity taken from her and thrown

on the mercy of others, all of them righteous and strong of punishment.

She tightens her shawl around her bony shoulders preparing to go, and I am glad, for out of the tail of my eye I have seen a golden head and heavy shoulders sulking his way through the crowd. Minister saw him, too, and that's why he nudged me; so we catch up with him, and he isn't at all glad to see us; but for once I don't care. I am going to do and say what I want today; my lack of feeling makes that possible.

"You're looking for Effie, are you not?" I say to him. He takes a quick intake of breath and turns his head to look me in the face, sudden anger written on his. "You're looking for Effie Gallows are you not?" For once in my life I felt pleasure in hurting someone. Still he said nothing. "If you are so eager to see her again, why did you not go up to the Grey House? Why didn't you go up to the Grey House, open the front gate, and walk up to the door? Ernest Weir would be pleased to know you. You know that's Effie's husband!"

I felt Minister trying to restrain me; but I was not to be put off, and if my heart beat strongly, it was delight in my strength and not fear of his anger. I was still cold and unfeeling all over, and I felt nothing could stop me showing him that I knew all about him. He was looking at me curiously, trying to make up

his mind whether I was trying to anger him, or whether I was merely a fool. I'll soon put him right on that! So I continued, and I made my voice sound as insinuating as I could:

"Perhaps you would like to know Ernest Weir? He'll probably come to the fair! I'm sure you would like to see Ernest Weir?"

He said: "The sooner the better!"

I was somewhat taken aback at that, and yet it was only logical he should say it. "What is he like?" he says next.

"Oh, he's all right," I answered.

"Is he strong?"

"What do you want to know that for?" I answered quickly. "See here, Ernest Weir is a nice lad; he is about the only innocent one in this whole mix-up."

"What mix-up?" he snapped out.

"If you don't know, don't let it bother you."

I felt fine. I had a sense of power, and I was going to use it. I am tired of being the prey of other people. I am going to make someone else feel for a time; I know how cheap it is, but something in me demands it.

But he wasn't to be put off so easily, and insisted again. "What do you mean by mix-up?"

"He means," puts in the minister, "that he knows about you and Effie."

"Yes?" he answers coldly. "And why is that a mix-up?"

"Tell me this," I said. "Just why are you at the fair?"

"I have come here to the fair," he said earnestly, "because I want to meet Ernest Weir. There's something I want to tell him, and as I don't know what he looks like, you will take me to him, won't you?" That was decent enough! I liked his frankness as far as it went; yet I was disturbed. Why should he be so anxious to meet Ernest Weir of a sudden? Was it curiosity? or was he jealous? or did he think that if Ernest knew the truth about Effie and himself, he would turn against her, or hand her over to him? Whatever it was, he showed a lack of realization of Effie's character; if he wanted to effect anything, he should go straight to Effie herself, and not behind her back. I can't imagine Effie having anything decided for her; but of course all my surmises are likely to be wrong; he may only have spoken so of Ernest to avoid speaking of Effie. We walked, the three of us together, slowly, all on the lookout for Ernest.

The fair grounds were suddenly crowded, more even than the other days. It will be hard to find anyone unless we come on them by accident. We were caught in the crowd and swayed with the crowd, but every now and then there were gaps in the structure of the

crowd, where one could pause and breathe and feel at ease; and it was in one of these pockets that we came slap, face to face, with Effie and Ernest. I looked quick, as if I had been trained to do it, from her face to the stranger's, and if his eyes blazed and his whole body trembled, hers was like a piece of wood. There was no expression at all, not a waver of an eye, nor did her colour change, but she looked on him as if she had never seen him before, and never expected to again; there was something unnatural about her ability to control herself: it frightened me. All our eyes now were turned on her: his in pain; Minister's in surprise; Ernest's were questioning; mine—I can't say for sure what they read like. I know I felt a mixture of things, anger amongst them. For after all, it wasn't right; here was the father of her child, here was the cause of all our worry, and she looked on him in utter indifference. We were suddenly all made foolish, for this whole pother was about Effie and her trouble and she seemed the least affected by it.

The crowd came upon us again and we were forced to move on in its direction. I saw to it that I would walk with Effie, the three of them in front. "Effie," I said, "do you know him?"

"No, I do not," she said.

I looked her straight in the face. "Effie, you must be lying."

She shook her head. "I have no reason to lie."

"Effie!" I cried out. "I've never known you to lie before."

"I canna help that," she said.

"Why do you lie, Effie?"

"Oh, let me be!" she answered wearily.

"Does Ernest know him?" I continued.

Her voice was cold, but I thought I could catch a slight waver.

"That I don't know."

"Does Ernest know of him?"

"I don't suppose he knows any more about him than I do," she said, innocently.

That was clever and almost disarming, but I wasn't taken in. "He was very anxious to know Ernest."

She looked me calmly in the eyes, the way a cat does sometimes, and said: "Well, then it's fine that it happened."

I gave up; there was nothing to be done. She was not going to admit that she knew him, that was clear. Did that mean that she no longer loved him? Or perhaps she never had? Or perhaps it meant that she didn't bear him a grudge—I don't know and it seems impossible to find out. I looked at her face searchingly, and it's just a very beautiful face, with no special expression of any kind, neither sad nor angry, happy or unhappy, and certainly not excited or nervous. It

would be impossible not to feel exasperated with her, but equally impossible not to feel a great admiration for such complete control.

I bought a little Japanese box at the fair last year that seemed to have no opening, and so well made and polished was it and covered with so many charming misleading lines that it takes quite a time to find where it opens by, but one does find it. I can liken Effie's present expression to this box, except that one doesn't find the secret or weak point so easily, and perhaps not at all. It's exasperating and annoying, and gives one a sense of helplessness.

With all my feelings of annoyance with Effie I was happy and gay to be walking with her at the fair, for apart from my love for her she's a fine, strapping, colourful-looking creature, and very exciting, and being with her gave me a feeling of recklessness and happy bravado; and endowed with these feelings one feels like a king at the fair. I had completely forgotten her trouble, and Ernest and the others were out of sight in the crowd, so I had about forgotten them too.

"Would you like your fortune told, Effie?" I felt it would be an intimate thing to do with her, to have our fortunes told together.

But she shook her head and said with a half-smile, "I know my fortune already, as sure as if I had had it told."

"I hope it's a good fortune, Effie."

She shook her head again. "It might be called a lack of fortune."

"I am sure you're down on yourself, Effie."

"Does it look like it?" she said.

"This is but a little bit of your fortune. Your fortune as a whole has got to be grand: they wouldn't dare hand you a bad fortune." I said this half in fun, but I was serious enough. To look at her and imagine anything but glorious fortune for her, seemed out of place.

"I thank you for the compliment," she said; "but there are two black rooks in the sky, and one has a siller locket in his mouth, and the other has a crust of bread, and the one with the siller locket wants my heart, and the other wants my life."

"What do you mean, Effie?"—for she was in earnest.

"If one gets my heart, the other might as well have my life."

"But, Effie," I cried, "you're talking in parables. How can you say what's going to happen to anyone? You must get hold of yourself; you mustn't let yourself become morbid. It's natural in your condition that you should feel a little harassed, but don't build up a sense of tragedy on the strength of that."

"There are some things that one knows! I am not harassed at all. I feel much calmer than I have for a

long while, for you see you can't start a thing wrong and not expect it to end up wrong, and I have thought about myself a great deal lately. I know about myself. I know just how I'll act in the face of any given condition. I can't do anything about it. I have to do what I feel like doing, because it's what I believe in. I am incapable of going against myself, and I am wise enough to know that it isn't the way of others here; and there's but one great law in life, to kill or be killed, and it isn't my way to kill, so—"

"But, Effie, you're strong! you're strong!"

"Aye," she said, "but to be strong is to be very weak. If I were not so strong I wouldn't stick to my feelings—I'd desert them for safety, and peace; but as it is, it's hopeless. When I was younger I was proud that I was strong and different from the others around me; but that was before I knew what it meant, and I wasn't so set in my thoughts, and I did try to protect myself."

"You married Ernest!"

"Aye," she continued, "but you see people like me can't protect themselves; they weren't meant to. I have made a hundred times more trouble for myself than if I had faced it alone. I believe if people are low in their hearts they can do low things and not hurt themselves, and never be punished; but when you know when a thing is wrong and still you do it, you

are doomed. There's no such thing as repentance; when a thing is started it has to work itself out. My life should have been lived a certain way, and I have strong enough feelings, so that I know what that way is; but by playing traitor to myself I have set myself to fight the kind of battle I am least fitted for and the one where my strength is of least account. I'll be glad in a way when it's over, for I have no patience to carry on with a thing that I have contempt for, and having started wrong, if I wanted to exist I should have continued wrong; but that I can't do now. I am telling you all this, John, for I think you know what I mean; I think in a way you have feeling for me."

"I love you, Effie," I said simply, and I felt a lump in my throat as I said it.

"Well then, will you stay by me? Can I depend on you to tolerate me, even if you don't understand?"

"Effie!" I cried. "I would do anything in the world for you; you must know that, anything at all; and I'll never doubt or question you again. You can ask me to do anything at all, at any time; you must know that."

She threw back her head and laughed at my lavishness. She clicked her arm with mine and put her cheek for a moment on my shoulder: "My, but you're sweet!" she said softly. "You're the nicest person in

the world, and if you'll carry a spear on my account, I'll mind the wounds that you might get in the battle."

It's true that she was laughing a little as she said this, but at heart I know she meant it, and they were sweet words, and over my fear for her that I had felt when she talked of herself, my heart rose like a happy bird, singing and reckless.

Where the others had got to I cannot say, and what had been passing between them, but I felt them on my conscience and that I ought to make some movement to find them out.

"Why do you bother?" said Effie. "Let them find us. They will if they want to."

"But—"

"You're curious, are you not?" said Effie. "Well then, you and I will find them and get what we can out of it."

"It's not that at all, Effie."

"Aye, it is, and you've got me curious, too, now. It isn't every day in the week that we meet a curly-headed stranger, is it now?"

"Why do you pretend to me, Effie? It isn't in keeping with what you said a minute ago."

"Aye, that's so! But do believe me when I say that I can't do anything else. I don't know that person because he died not long ago; I mean that for me he

died, and this man who walks about the fair grounds is a total stranger to me."

"I see what you mean, but all the same you're no stranger to him. . . . He came here only to see you, and I think you hurt him very much when you pretended not to know him."

"I don't know him, I tell you," cried Effie. "I know him to look at, yes, but I never laid much stress on that; and I thought I knew him inside, but I suddenly found out that I didn't know him at all, and now I haven't the interest to try and find him out, or yet the taste for it."

"Did he hurt you very much?" I asked.

"Yes, but he died for it."

"Do you think he knows that, Effie?"

"I have no interest in him at all. He will probably get me into sore trouble; that's why he's here, no doubt, but it can't be helped; it's all part of a wrong that has to work itself out. It's what I told you: by not acting true to myself I have given him and all the others who want it power over me. This is but one of the twists of the snake in my garden, and I have no interest in it."

"But how can you help but feel interest when it's you yourself that's concerned?"

"That's just what I told you: why won't you understand it? It's not me at all, but the poor shoddy

creature that has to fight for me that I sent out to fight for me; it's my mistake."

"But, Effie," I said seriously, "other people won't look at it like that."

"Don't I know that!" she answered. "There's where my great weakness is; that's why I am so defenceless; that's why I'll go under; that's why I'll be done in!"

"Effie, you can't say that!" I cried.

"Yes, I can; I do; I know! So let us forget it for a wee and find our friends."

So we searched, and at last we came across them, and they were all three as white as death, and Minister could hardly wait to pull me aside, and Effie too who would have walked with them.

"Don't go with them," he said to her. "They're talking dreadfully. Oh, it's been awful! John, he told Ernest all about himself and Effie."

"How was Ernest?" asked Effie sadly.

"He was shattered," said Minister.

"Then I am going to speak to him," said Effie, and although we wanted to stop her she left us.

"What does he want? Does he want Effie?" I asked.

"Aye, that's it! He wants her and the child."

"What was Ernest like?"

"He felt awful at first," said Minister. "I thought he wasn't going to be able to walk; I had to hold him up, then he turned against Effie, and so did the others;

it was terrible to hear them. They picked her to bits; of course they were both angry with her, but I can't say I think much of either of them for it. Then they turned on each other. For some reason he seems to be very jealous of Ernest; I thought it would have been the other way round but I think he feels, since Effie wouldn't speak to him, inferior and at a great disadvantage."

"What is Ernest going to do about it? Did he say?"

"No, he kept on saying over and over: 'My mother was right; my mother was right; she'll tell me what to do.' "

"Oh, good God! I thought it couldn't be worse."

"If he tells his mother, it will be all over the village at once."

"What a weak fool to have to talk to his mother!"

"Maybe I could get him to keep quiet," he said.

"Perhaps I might even talk to his mother myself; but what could I say? It's all inevitable. Effie's right—nothing can be done now; it's too late, it was always too late."

"I don't suppose he could keep it from his mother, and anyhow she'd be sure to find out soon enough."

"Dear God, what's to be done now?"

Through my thoughts I could hear Minister talking. He was saying: "I said to him, 'If I were you I wouldn't

tell my mother right off. Think a little over it.' But he answered stubbornly: 'My mother's a good woman; she'll do what's fair.' He's a weak man, he would run straight to his mother; and I don't think, as far as I can judge, that his mother's such a saint, and I don't think she's overfond of Effie."

"You're right! She grudges every breath that Effie draws."

"Then it's sure to be the worst thing for Effie," said Minister. "Why can't you talk to him, John, and tell him that Ernest should be stopped from going to his mother right off, till at least he has calmed a little? He must love Effie, he wouldn't want harm to come to her; if he knew what Ernest's mother is like he might be able to force him to wait. He's a stronger character than Ernest."

"I might try that," I answered; "it might work. I will, I'll get hold of him and talk to him; it might do some good—anyhow it won't hurt."

I could see Effie coming back to us through the crowd; she looked just the same! "He won't have anything to do with me, but call me low names," she said. She saw my expression. "He's quite right," she said; "you know that."

"Effie, he's going to tell his mother."

"Yes." And she smiled quietly. "That's as it should be." Then she smiled once more. "Did ever a woman

in the world have a child with more to-do? People falling left and right; ugly names flying about; men with white faces and trembling hands, and all because I carry in my own womb and feed from my own body this strange thing that will one day be my child. It's enough to make you laugh out loud."

"Effie Gallows," said Minister, "it's a most serious matter." He was a little annoyed at what I could see he considered her flippancy.

"You're quite right," she answered, "but nevertheless, just because the irons are in the fire we needn't behave as if they were laid on our backs." But she suddenly stiffened. "Look who we have with us now, and just when we seem to be calm."

"Make him stop, Effie!" I cried, for it was Fiddler, with his fists thrust in the stranger's face, and his face was red and angry.

"Let them alone," said Effie. "They both like a fight; let them have it!"

The crowd had formed a circle; they knew what to expect and they could see by the size of the two men that it was going to be a good fight; bets were even made. I thought of Ernest: I'd better find him and keep him by me.

"Ernest," I said, "you don't want to see this, do you? Can't we go and sit somewhere, for you look white?"

"I do want to see this," he said viciously; "I want to see him pummelled to death."

"Which one?" I asked.

"Oh, either of them," he said weakly.

So we watched, and it was a gruesome sight. There is something so strange in the sight of two normal men solemnly punching each other's faces that if it were not so terrifying a sight to me I would burst out laughing. They are so pompous about it and so self-righteous and their hatred of each other is so bound about by so many polite laws. It always seemed to me that if one hated another so much that one felt that the only way to satisfy that hatred was to physically hurt him, then one should go and do it wholeheartedly, hitting in the places, if one could, where it hurt most and where most damage can be done. But instead of that, what do they do? They solemnly face each other and, controlling their instincts to obey certain given laws, they play a more or less tame game with each other. They fight like gentlemen; it's mad! Imagine a true gentleman wanting to fight and hurt anyone. It makes you believe that people as a whole have so little belief in anything that they only feel safe when they are playing a game. And besides, what can one ever prove by punching anyone's head, except that the head can bruise and the nose bleed? They prove of course that one man is stronger than

the other, but what of that? Their hatred of each other hardly ever starts that way. No, it's a certain physical pleasure they get from it, and I suppose turning it into a game takes all moral responsibility away from them and of course it protects them from running the risk of getting seriously hurt and of seriously hurting; so it's all false from the beginning—not the desire to fight, of course, but the trick of turning it into something polite and virtuous. Where Effie went during this fight I don't know, and what she felt I can't say, for I could see her nowhere. She probably went off to the Grey House to be by herself, for I am sure she is not the type of woman to enjoy the sight of two men tearing at each other on her account.

I stood by Ernest holding him by the arm lightly, for I was afraid he might get away from me, although he showed no sign of wanting to. They were two strong fighters, but Fiddler struck me as the weaker of the two; but then he is quite a bit older. His expression was about the same as ever, only more so. I had to smile to myself at the sight of him, for it was the first time to my mind that the wild expression and the whole dramatic bearing of the man seemed in place, and to have all the proper trappings; and the noises that came from him were no different than they ever were, but here they seemed in place, and fitted. There was no doubt as to who was the stronger

and wiser fighter and Fiddler was beginning to look haggard. They had fallen, and there they lay, the stranger on top writhing and twisting and breathing hard. They were right where we stood, Fiddler was trying desperately to get on his feet and the fight seemed now to hang on whether Fiddler could get up or not, or perhaps get on top. The crowd was yelling and egging him on; they were now so wrought up and in such a state of excitement that the look on their faces gave me a fright, so bestial and mean it was. I felt Ernest, like the weak man he was, trembling all over with a sort of sweet lust; his face was distorted, and whining little animal sounds were squirted out from between his dry lips mixed with a frothy saliva with which his mouth seemed to be full. I was disgusted with him, and could hardly bear to stay by him.

It looked hopeless now for Fiddler; he had almost given up and the stranger out of kindness was relaxing his hold a little. He must have known that we stood there, and I suppose, half in pride and half in a desire to associate himself with someone—for he had had no backing during the fight, since the crowd knew Fiddler more or less, while he was a total stranger to most, and the Scotch are a clannish people—he turned his face up toward us and smiled at us. I was horrified, sick with horror, for at the moment he turned his

face to us, Ernest let go and with all his force kicked him full in the face. It made a dull gritty sound, and blood came from no given point but covered his face, almost directly. God, what a thing to do! What a loathsome dirty swinish trick! I felt as if I were going to vomit.

The crowd gave a roar of rage and instantly went mad. Men, all climbing over each other, howling and raging, tearing at each other, about a hundred men piled on top of each other, kicking and biting, and beating their way through. I suppose they thought that they were going to get at Ernest; that must have been the idea, but they never seemed to give a thought to the poor lad with the bleeding face that they were burying under their numbers. I managed to get myself free and stood swaying. I was shaking all over and still felt I was going to vomit; my clothes were torn half off my back and on my cheek I had a deep scratch that ended in one corner of my mouth.

I started to walk away, out of an instinct to escape; then of course I thought of the poor stranger and I had to turn back, for I felt that if I didn't look after him nobody would. They had forgotten about him; it was Ernest they were out for, and I felt I didn't care what happened to him; he deserved all he got. I wondered vaguely if he were somewhere amongst the fighting men, or if he had got away. There was so

much confusion and hysteria that it might have been possible for him to run. Anyhow, I began the distasteful business of getting into the fight again. I tried to drag one man off another but naturally since I couldn't reason with him and explain my object, he took it as a personal attack, and down, thump, I went, and I was punched and twisted; and this man, whoever he was, seemed to have none of the fine ethics of fighting that I had been sneering at a short while back, for him anything seemed permissible. My hair was torn at until it either came out at the roots or broke half-way; my nose was twisted until it must have resembled a corkscrew; an attempt was made to push my left eye in. I suddenly felt desperate: was I going to be killed? Through my fear and pain I realized just how funny my case was: here I was fighting a fight I had no interest in at all; the only idea that had forced me in was a kindly one; now I saw too late that not only was the fulfilment of my idea impossible, but I was being punished as if I were a fiend. I felt I couldn't bear it another second, I made the desperate fluttering shivering kind of attempt that I have seen a caught fish make in its last desperate death agony, and to my amazement I was suddenly free and staggering on my feet once more. I looked down, wanting to see this monster that had so nearly done for me; but who he was I couldn't tell, for apparently he had thrown him-

self into the fight once again, and he might have been any one of the fighting men. I turned my back on them and made up my mind to go home. I was badly hurt and useless.

I went limping and stumbling home. I was really very weak and very stiff all over. I felt angry and sorry for myself at the selfsame time, and my nose I found, adding to my self-pity, was bleeding thinly; I looked back ever so often, and they were still at it. Well, let them fight, the fools! I felt almost like throwing a stone at them, but of course I wouldn't; and anyhow it might inspire one of them to come after me, and that I couldn't face. I think if one of them had come after me and started to fight I would just have lain down flat and let him kill me if he wanted to; I had no fight left in me of any description.

It was a long, dreary, painful walk home. I was shattered both in heart and body, and to make it more painful, I was being taunted by the picture of what I must look like now, compared with the fine dashing figure I cut in my mind when I walked the fair grounds with Effie. And then, of course—and here I'll reveal myself to you as a pretty poor specimen—after all I have my dignity as the schoolmaster to think of and I shouldn't have been sprawling on the ground at the fair covered with earth, having my ears and nose torn off; it wasn't seemly. Well, it's over now, and it

won't happen again and perhaps I wasn't especially noticed.

What happened to the fighters I don't know, to Fiddler, or the stranger. I only know that that night it rained long and loud, and in the morning when the sun grew strong a low-lying grey mist was drawn from the ground, the earth being still wet. Then as the sun grew even stronger, the mist was lifted.

Lying in the middle of the fair grounds, was a man who had been killed by someone, with a knife. The rain had washed all the blood from his wound; he lay with his arms outstretched and the sun on his face, smiling weakly. Round about, the grass was beaten down and scattered with bits of crumpled paper and orange peel and tattered ribbons and all the impersonal little bits of death that are left when the fair moves away. And the dead man lay like a given symbol of all this—and already the ants had mounted his brow. When I heard of this horror, my thoughts flew to two women: one was young and the other very old, and they lived in opposite parts of the village, for the man who lay on the damp grass, whom the fair had left behind, was Ernest Weir.

V

ONE month has gone by since the fair left the village. The earth is fast hardening and drying up, for every morning now the frost lies like sugar on the grass and the sun is becoming fainter and fainter and appearing less often. Winter, black and powerful, is close at hand.

The fair, and what took place at the fair, is like a sore in the side of Durkie, and the whole village thinks of nothing else. They feel as if a curse was on them and their hatred of Effie has grown a hundred times. She is now large with child and never leaves her house and, except for the minister and myself, she sees no one. Fiddler and the stranger were never seen again after the fair. Nailed on a large tree that dominates

the village green is a written description of Fiddler and a promise of money for the one who might capture him or tell where he is, for they have come to the conclusion that it was he that killed Ernest. No one seemed to have thought of the stranger as the one who might have done it except, perhaps myself, and it would be far from my wish to give anyone the thought of his guilt, not out of love for the stranger but because I couldn't bear to have it on my conscience that I was responsible for a man's life or his being brought to what they call justice. And even if I were sure I think I would let it rest as it is, for it seems to me that they have a small chance of ever catching Fiddler, since he's always led a roving life and no one knows more than he how to get out of people's way and you may depend on it that he has heard of the whole trouble and knows he's wanted. In fact, since he left he must have thought that he'd better run and, of course, it's only natural that they should pick on Fiddler—for, besides being an outlaw, he was known to be wild and the one most likely to do a thing like that and the matter of hanging him would have no opposition from anyone, and the stranger, if they thought of him at all, was, after all, the son of a respectable man, who was also a mill-owner. And the chief way that men make a living in Durkie is by their weaving, so you see, hanging the stranger

would be a rather ticklish business, so all around it's probably best.

So that's how it stands, and until the whole thing is cleared up in some form or other Durkie will not feel natural again or be able to forget it or be able to breathe freely again.

Ernest was taken from the fair grounds to Effie's house and buried from there. It was an ordeal for all of us concerned. This wasn't just a simple death; every one of us felt that there was something shameful about it, something secret and shameful. No one dared mention the word "murder"; in fact it wasn't until he was safe and buried that the cause of his death was freely spoken of. It was strange to be climbing the hill to Effie's door to have Ernest buried. It was such a short time ago that we entered the same house to have him married, and between the goings-on at his wedding and at his burial there was little difference; the same drinking of wine, the same excitement and, when the wine had worked, the same sexual understanding between the men and women—just the same as it was before, but without Ernest; Ernest was in his wooden box, six feet underground.

The procession to the graveyard was slow and uncomfortable, for it was raining, a soft thin drizzle, that hung on your eyelashes and blinded your eyes, and for those who carried the coffin it was very hard.

Around the broken grave we stood. The rain had turned the earth to mud and on the surface of the mounds of earth that had been spaded out to make the grave, the stones stood out smooth and shining, washed clean by the rain. It all seemed sordid and miserable, and when Minister came to sprinkle earth on the coffin, it stuck to his fingers and had to be shaken off very much as one empties a spoon of jam. We turned away reluctantly and slowly, for I think that we all felt that it seemed a terrible thing to leave poor Ernest alone in his wooden box in a hole that was already part full of water.

I looked back when we had gone a few yards and saw two women standing on either side of his grave. They were Effie and his mother and they were looking straight at each other. Then Effie stretched out her hand but his mother refused hers and drew her shawl about her and came scurrying after us as if she were running from something evil. I looked back again and Effie was still there, standing alone. I thought to go back to her but prudence and self-consciousness kept me from it. She caught up on us down the road, then we all walked on together still slowly and ceremoniously to the Grey House where we ate the rich food that Effie had been up all night getting ready and drank her wine, all but Mistress Weir, who, so Effie told me, had refused to enter her house.

Minister, when it came time to leave, said to me: "I am going to stay with Effie awhile. She must feel lonely."

"I'll stay too," I said.

So, when all the others were gone, we sat us down by the fire. Behind us the room was in great untidiness, glasses and fallen bits of food that had been mashed into the floor by the heavy feet; the table was still to be cleared off and the china put away.

"You will have somebody come and help you tidy up," I said.

"No," said Effie, "I want to be busy."

We sat in silence. I wanted desperately to ask her what she was going to do; if she was going away; could she bear to live on here alone; if she wasn't going to get a woman to come and stay with her; if she knew of any. I had been racking my brains to think of a woman I might know of, but a woman to stay with Effie would have to be someone special and I knew of none. Of course, I knew very well that Effie might prefer to be alone, or at least she would say that, but she ought to have someone else. She is going to have a child. She ought to have someone to look after her and help her with the work. Usually Ernest's mother would have come to live with her son's widow, but in this case that was impossible. I was sore troubled with all this and kept thinking of

the time when Minister and I would have to go, and dreading it.

Effie still had the look on her face that she had worn at the fair when she saw the stranger. It had never left her. What a long time off that all seemed! It was like something that happened in another life, the fair and the stranger, and the fiddler and the fight, and then Ernest. It seems as if the fight had swallowed them all up and the fair had taken them all off somewhere. And now we have dug a hole and put in it all that remained of poor Ernest and the whole thing is wiped out, just as if it had never been real.

Minister's thoughts must have been about the same as mine, for he said: "Effie, I hope you don't intend to stay on alone here?"

"Where could I go?" she said. Then, as an afterthought: "Even if I wanted to?"

"You could go to Edinburgh," he said. "It's more cheerful there and I have friends there that would be kind to you."

"I wish I could, but somehow I canna leave this house, nor this town. I feel I must stay here. When I feel different about it, I'll be happy to go."

"Effie," said Minister, gently, "would it not be better for your child to go away?"

She shook her head. "My child will be best where I am best."

"Effie," he said again, "then go for your own sake. You might think to hear me that it would mean nothing to me to have you go, but you know better than that. I am thinking only about what's best for you. The town is bitter against you, Effie. You'd be better somewhere else." His forehead was wet with sweat. He wiped it off with his hand; he was very serious.

"I know all that," said Effie. "Maybe that's why I don't want to go."

I felt it was my turn to try and persuade her, so: "Effie," I said, "when you have had your child, you can come back. Have your child in Edinburgh and come back." It seemed to me a fine simple conclusion. "By that time they'll have forgotten the whole thing, and with a child in the house you won't be so liable to be lonely."

She smiled at me. "That's like you, John, to think that I both have my scone and eat it; no, it won't work. You can't cheat life like that, leastwise in this part of the world."

"Effie," said Minister, "I think in this you are very unwise; you don't owe it to anyone to risk hurting yourself."

"Aye," she said, "I owe it to myself."

"No," I cried out, "you've gone through enough. You don't have to punish yourself any more; it's not asked of you."

"It isn't punishment for me to stay; you know that well enough. It would be punishment for me to go," she cried.

"Never mind your conscience, Effie. For God's sake, go!" cried the minister.

There was a pause. "Will you both stop picking on me?" said Effie. "Because it does no good. I'll say to you both clearly for the last time—I am not going. I am staying here."

We recognized it as hopeless. It was plain her mind was made up and nothing would change it, so the three of us sat in silence, gaining calm, for we had got ourselves worked up over it all. I looked at the minister, and it was plain to see that there was a great struggle going on in his mind; he was restless and nervous, and he would look suddenly at Effie, and just as suddenly look away again. He wrung his hands and bit at his underlip.

"What's got hold of him?" I thought, for all this emotion seemed more, and of a different quality, than the occasion demanded.

Then it dawned on me and the blood rushed to my head. He was wondering if he would dare ask Effie to marry him. I looked at him again—sure that was it. My mind scattered like a nest of frightened mice. Would he dare do it? Would that calm the village toward her, or would they force the minister to go if

he did that? But would Effie marry him? She might. How soon could she marry him if she decided to? They would have to wait. Would he come to the Grey House to live—the way Ernest did? My feeling—what would my feeling be toward them? . . . Already I pictured myself calling on them. What would my attitude be? The minister's wife—would she go to church? The minister's wife would have to go to church. No, I can't picture it—but just the same, Effie married Ernest: why shouldn't she marry the minister? Why hadn't I thought to ask her to marry me? Why shouldn't she marry me? It would be better than marrying the minister; they wouldn't stand for having Effie as the minister's wife. He ought to have more sense; but if he asks her and she says yes, I'll never have a chance.

Minister had cleared his throat. I looked at him; he seemed decided.

"He's going to do it now," I thought. My heart was pounding till I was afraid it might be heard.

"Effie," I heard him say, "you can't live alone. If you won't go away, will you not marry me?" It was said humbly; he was offering a solution to her not being alone; that was all; it was put that way, and yet it may have been out of a sense of decency, Ernest being but buried.

Effie looked at him as if she had not heard aright. He made as if to begin again.

"No," she said, "don't say it again. I heard you the first time, but surely you must be mad." Then she faced him squarely, turning in her chair to do so. "Do you mean to tell me that you would marry me?"

He nodded his head. "That's what I am asking you."

"But, Minister, surely you can't mean it?"

"Yes, I do," he answered simply, like a child, "indeed I do."

"But, Minister, you must be the kindest man that ever lived."

"It's not all kindness," he said.

She was still astonished; she still couldn't get used to the idea; she still looked at him as if he were some rare creature that she had never seen before.

"I can't get over it," she said; then turning to me: "Did you ever hear anything like it, a good kind man like that?" Then turning to him again: "You must be a saint. I simply cannot believe it."

"Effie," I said, "you haven't answered him yet. Will you marry him?"

"Of course, I won't! Do you think for a minute that I would do such a thing to him?"

"But, Effie, I would like to marry you," he said.

She looked at him kindly. "I simply wouldn't hear of it," she said. "It would be a crime and I never would forgive myself. It would be a great joke on the village, though, but they wouldn't thole it for a minute. Can

you imagine the dither they would be in when the banns were posted?"

"We could get married in Edinburgh," Minister said; "we could post the banns there."

"You see," said Effie, "you've thought it all out and you know as well as I do that the actual wedding would be the mildest of all your troubles. And it isn't only what your parish would say and do, it's what it would do to you, yourself, inside. It would break you, Minister; it would twist you and torture you; it would poison you, and in the end it would destroy you. It isn't that I don't think you strong; I know you are strong, but this is not the kind of thing that you should try your strength at. Even me myself, Minister, even if I were a pure young virgin that there was no trouble connected with, even if you were not a minister, and I lived in Edinburgh, I would not be the kind of woman that you could lie at peace with. You would have no happiness and no contentment with me in your house, and that's what you need more than all else, peace and contentment."

"I think I know what's best for myself, Effie," said the minister. "Why do you not give the proper reason, that you simply don't want to marry me?"

"But that's not so!" Effie said. "I would be very happy to marry you. I would, in fact, be very happy to marry anyone. I would like it much better than

living alone, and I would never deceive anyone again. If they knew all about my plight and still wanted to marry me, I would be very happy to. I am sore put out that it's you that asked me to marry, that I haven't the heart in me to hurt you, and that I happen to feel this way about it, for I am sure I'll never get another chance. I know that there are few men, if they knew about me, who would want me."

My heart had started to pound again, for here was my chance, but to save myself I couldn't force the words out before Minister. I tried but I couldn't.

"If you change your mind, Effie," said Minister.

"Aye," she answered, "I'll come helter-skelter to tell you."

There was a stiff silence for a while, but as the light of the fire petered out somewhat, and each of us had a circle of dark around us, protecting us from the others' eyes, we became more at ease and natural. At last we had to go and the three of us stood up, tall and shadowy in the half-light. Effie came with us to the door.

"Would you come to church Sunday?" Minister asked Effie. "It might comfort you a little. I would pick out something special to read that I think you would like; there are some wonderful fine chapters in the Bible. Would you not come, just this once?"

But she was decided about it. "No, thank you, Minister. I have a Bible here if I should feel like it."

"We can come and see you soon again, can't we, Effie," I said.

"Whenever you can, and you think it's all right."

So we shook her hand, and she stood for a little watching us down the path. Her face was pale and wan in the dark, her mouth was a little open, and her eyes were like two dark lonely flowers.

"Good-night," she said softly, "and thank you—both."

We walked back sadly and reluctantly. It seemed tragic and brutal to have left her all alone in the empty house, the grey stone house, but what could we do? She never would have let us stay, even if we had offered. We could have sat up the three of us round the fire all night, but everyone in Durkie would have known of it next day; and then what difference would one night have made, when she has all her nights to spend alone?

We walked on in silence; there was no need to talk. Each one knew that he was having the same thoughts as the other, and they weren't thoughts that you could argue about; they were just plain bitter truths.

Minister was, I think, beginning to realize that what Effie had said to him about marriage was so, for he said to me out of nothing: "I suppose that having once been married, one knows more what marriage is apt to do to you?"

"Yes, of course, that must be true."

"Then do you think that having been married to one man makes it easier to understand all other men?"

"I wouldn't say that," I replied, "but it must help, for after all it puts you in the way of considering someone else."

"Then do you think Effie knows me well enough to know what's best for me?"

"No; I wouldn't say that for sure, but she does know herself better than you do, and she knows more about the demands of marriage than you do."

"Then you think it would be a mistake all around, her marrying me; not only as far as my parish is concerned, but for me?"

"Yes, I do," I said. "I do sincerely."

Then he said: "Perhaps she is right; in fact, I think she is right, for she ought to know, and she's honest and wouldn't say so unless she thought so; so she must be right."

Then he said: "Could you marry Effie Gallows?"

"I thought perhaps I'd ask her."

"Then why didn't you do it tonight? You heard

what she said. Why didn't you ask her? It might have been a great comfort to her."

"I was thinking of your feelings," I said.

"Oh, man, how could you! How could you think of anyone but her? I am not in the plight she is; I tell you what, we'll go back now, and you can ask her now." He stopped short in the road facing me.

"Oh, no, I canna!" I was truly alarmed. "No, I'll do it myself, in my own way; I couldn't do it now."

"Couldn't you go back yourself, then?"

"No, I'd better not; in a wee while I'll do it when I've thought it all out, and anyhow you know, she may not want to marry me either."

"Oh," cried Minister earnestly, "I am sure she would! I feel it in my bones; I am sure she will."

But he saw I wouldn't do it now, either with him or alone, so he gave up trying, and we kept our silence till we reached my gate; then he said again: "You will do it soon?"

"Aye," I answered.

"Tomorrow?"

"Perhaps so."

"Well, good-night, John, and good luck to you."

"Good-night, Minister, and thank you." And I smiled to myself, for I remembered how she had said,

"Thank you both"; and that was what I did—but I only said the "Thank you" out loud; the "both" I kept to myself.

I lay awake all the night through, my mind whirring and sweeping about like a dying fly buzzing with silly static conversations with imaginary people about imaginary things, through which came sailing majestic and dramatic visions of myself and Effie walking through the village street where all the shutters were closed on the cottage windows, and Fiddler came after us, playing on his fiddle that made no sound of music. Then we were in Minister's parlour, and we were bowing our heads as he prayed over us, and that meant that we were married. Then I saw myself with Effie's child in my arms, and it was hideously ugly and vicious and never cried like other children but lay making terrible faces. And all it ate it threw up and the food it vomited lay in sour lumps on the front of its gown and had a vile, bitter odour. The vision of this horrible child was so clear in my mind that I had to sit up in bed and try to control my senses, for I felt sick, and the sheets of my bed seemed to smell as the child's sour food had smelt. Then I would lie down again and close my eyes tightly and try to force myself to sleep, but it was hopeless. I lay with my

face so hard on the pillow that it hurt and made red, beating lines on my cheek.

My mind clung desperately like a vice to what seemed a soft suggestion of a shadow that seemed to move toward the field of sleep, the warm, lush meadows of sleep. But the struggle was too much for my strength and I had to let go, and my mind snapped back like a released stretch of elastic, and immediately I was back, caught in the trough of my own fear, and a hundred steel hammers were beating the thoughts and words from my aching head. I couldn't sleep, but I couldn't go on like this, either. I felt I was going mad. I got up out of bed and lit the lamp: the sudden light burnt my eyes, just as if acid had been poured on them. I went over solemnly to the mirror and looked at myself and I was a sad-looking sight; but it seemed to calm me somewhat, this seeing myself in the glass, and bring me back to reality. I carried my lamp and went into the parlour and set it on the mantel and poked up the fire that was not quite out; then I poured myself a drink and sat by the fire to drink it. I poured myself another drink. I was feeling much better and my thoughts had begun to take some order in my brain. I said to myself, half out loud:

"Now, let us try and look at this thing clearly. You may be going to marry Effie Gallows. Yes, that's so! Well, you love Effie Gallows, do you not? Yes, I

do, indeed I do! Well, what am I so worried about? I am going to be honest with myself! The truth is, I am not quite up to it, and that's a fact. I am a coward, I suppose. But after all," I argued with myself, "you wouldn't have much to lose; you're not friendly or fond of any of the villagers; you would still have the minister. I know that, but the truth is that even if I did dislike intensely most people in the town of Durkie I still want to keep in with them. I don't want them to go against me. I couldn't face it! Oh, I feel cheap and contemptible, but that's how it is and I can't help it. But, of course, if Effie would come and live in Edinburgh that would change things altogether. To live in Edinburgh with Effie would be like living in heaven. Perhaps she would come."

The whisky was beginning to tell and I felt strange powers in me. I am sure I could make her see it. I poured myself yet another drink. "To me and Effie," I said seriously, and held my glass high. I settled back in my chair; I was glowing all over; my teeth felt as if they were covered with velvet. Against the warm skin of one leg I could feel the rough, strong hair of the other, and it was pleasant and luxurious. I let my thoughts rest on Effie, on her beauty and the fine, firm animal loveliness of her body. I let my hands smooth over her breasts; I felt the long, fresh line of her thigh; I twisted the strong, dark hair of her head

three times around my hand and I let my cheek lean on it; I filled her with the joy of my passion; then I threw my arms out wide and I laughed, loud and frankly.

So lost I had been in my thoughts that I was shocked by the sound of my own laughing, and the whisky was spilling from my glass, and a cock outside was crowing as if its heart would break. I felt my eyes and they were wet with tears. The cock was still crowing when I walked unevenly from the room, and in my mind danced joyously the promise that tomorrow I would ask Effie; and she could live where she liked; I would live with her wherever she was. I threw myself on the bed and I groaned with satisfaction and fell almost at once into a sleep that was dark and deep and full of peace.

So next day, after the last child had banged the schoolhouse door and gone on his way home, I put away my books and washed my hands and got ready to go and see Effie. I was nervous, and all day long I had been full of impatience with my pupils and anxious to have school out; but now that it was so I had half a wish that this time had never arrived. I looked at my watch—it was well after four. Already it was getting dark. "Around five," I unconsciously thought,

"it will be dark." What I meant was that I would stand less chance of being seen opening Effie's gate. I went around the desks, using up the time straightening rulers and picking up bits of paper from the floor. I studied the map of Scotland that hung on the wall; I found Durkie. It was very, very small and so little thought of that the lettering was hardly discernible. I measured the difference of miles between Durkie and Edinburgh—about fifty, I should say. It was so dark by now that I couldn't see clearly any more. Should I light the lamp? I thought not. I would sit down in the growing dark and wait, so I sat down on my chair that was, like all teachers' chairs, quite high, and in the dark I felt as if I were sitting a mile high in the air. I looked at my watch again and I had to hold it close to my face and peer at it hard till I could make it out. It was now quarter to five. By the time I have put on my coat and locked up it will be almost five, then I can walk slowly. . . .

The road seemed deserted. The villagers were sitting around their fires warming their hands and smoking their clay pipes. It was a damp, foggy night, the usual Scotch early winter night. It was no pleasure to be out. I was naturally glad of this, for had the night been clear there would have been groups of the town lads gathered round the lamp posts, boasting and talking things over, their hands in their pockets, their

coat collars turned up, jumping up and down to keep warm. Their breaths would come out of their mouths like steam, for there was frost in the air. It was always a torture for me to walk by one of these groups, for their silence as you passed was of a critical kind and you knew that they were only biding their time till you were out of earshot; then they would laugh at you.

I had reached the Grey House now, and was knocking at the door. Effie looked surprised to see me, but glad. I followed her down the hall and into the kitchen. I took off my coat and hung it over a chair back to give it a chance to dry if it needed it. It struck me as I did it that my attitude was already very self-assured and possessive, just as if I belonged here. We sat down by the fire and I thought to myself: "The way to do this is to be natural and say it right out. Don't lead up to or try to suggest it; just do it, just say it." So I opened my mouth to begin, but Effie got her word in before mine.

"You're very strange tonight. What ails you? You look as if you had come to arrest me; perhaps, like Minister, you've come to sacrifice yourself on the altar of kindness. Surely, John, you're not so befuddled that you're going to offer to marry me, too."

"You do Minister a grave injustice, Effie," I said. "He is very fond of you and you must know it; he

was tormented last night when you refused him. He hardly spoke a word on the way home."

"Shall I tell you just what he said?"

I could do nothing but look dumbly at her. My self-assurance seemed to have flown.

"Shall I tell you just what he said to you on the way home?" she went on. "Well, he said to you: 'Why didn't you ask her to marry you, too?' And you hung your head in shame and you probably answered: 'But, Minister, I am not in the ministry like you. It isn't in my ken to go about saving fallen women like you.' And he probably put his hand on your shoulder and looked in your eyes and said in a kingly voice: 'But, John, we are all God's ministers,' and you felt the great religious urge, and mebbe you stood in the burn together, and mebbe the water was sprinkled on your bowed head. Anyhow, here you are, decked out like a knight of the Holy Land, and your eyes are shining with the light of renunciation and there's a halo of light hanging on your head, a wee bit squint, it's true, but a halo just the same. The only thing I really have against it, though, is that it doesn't quite become you, John. It's not quite your style, I tell you."

She jumped up and stamped her foot, and threw back her head, for she was angry. "I am tired of being treated like a poor broken creature. I am tired of this air of self-sacrifice that hangs around you both. I'll

have you know that it's not such a horror to be married to me, shamed even as I am. I'll have you know, too, that if there's any saving to be done, I'll save myself! I'll look after myself; I am more fitted to do it than either of you."

She swooped down suddenly and wrenched the poker up and violently started to poke the fire, then, straightening herself, she said: "I won't have it. Take your charity to some idiot village lass. There are plenty of them; they need it, I don't." She sat down stiffly, glaring into the fire.

I was shaken and humiliated, but nevertheless I saw that in a way she was right: I realized how it must all have seemed to her. Nevertheless it struck me as not quite fair, for after all, I was in dead earnest and wasn't moved only by consideration of her to ask her to marry me. It was really Minister's fault. It was he who had set the tempo of the whole thing. I had resented it last night. I was in a false position, although there was just enough truth in what she said to have it rankle. Though God only knows that if I hadn't felt a slight sense of superiority over her I never could have brought myself to the state of courage to speak to her of marriage or my feeling for her. So in a way my indignation was not quite feigned.

"Effie," I said, "you do me an injustice. You can-

not judge me by Minister. I have known you for a long time and as far as I can remember I have always wanted to marry you."

"If that's so," said Effie, "you've picked a nice time for it. I've never known you, John, to make so free with the ceremonies of living; you seem to have forgotten that my last husband is but two days in the ground."

"It's not like you either, Effie, to have such a lack in understanding, or to pay such respect to the ceremonies of living." I was honestly indignant now, and with good reason, I thought.

"Oh, keep to your own character, John, and you won't go around proposing to widows with murdered husbands. I am sorry," she said less severely, "to be so nasty about it. I know you mean well, but I am tired and not in a fair temper."

I went over to her and held her hands, even though she did protest. "You've got to believe me when I tell you that I want to marry you, that I always have, and not for the reasons that you think, but that I love you, that I would rather love you than anyone else, that I couldn't be happy living with anyone else, that if you won't have me then I'll never marry anyone else. Why, Effie, there's no one like you! I'll never meet another like you! Don't take me up wrong; I am telling you God's truth."

She was looking at me. "I do believe you," she said. "I didn't understand at first. I am not quite sure about you even now. It seems to me that there is a great deal of pity in your love for me."

I shook my head. "That's not so and you know it! How could I feel pity for you, Effie? You know as well as I do that you are a much stronger, finer person than I am. I might feel concern for you, but that's not the same as pity, and it's only natural that I should feel concern, since I love you. Let us get married, Effie. We'll be right happy together and if we're together through everything, things won't matter."

"It sounds all right," said Effie, "but things don't work out the way they sound."

"Then even so, if you'll say you'll marry me, I won't care what happens. It will be worth it; I'd rather be unhappy with you than happy alone or with anyone else."

She smiled at that; and I was glad to see her smile again, and I felt gay and youthful to have been able to make so much of an impression on her.

"If we were to get married, it wouldn't be before a month had passed," she said; "so why wouldn't it be a fine idea to give you a month to think it over? If you felt the same after a month has passed, then you could ask me over again."

"But I couldn't possibly change, Effie," I said.

"You never know," she answered, "what might happen. And besides, it will give us both time to think about it; so if you please, we won't consider it until we've talked it over again." Then she gave a wicked smile and said: "But you had better tell Minister, for I don't want to be prayed over, and God knows who he might send next to beg for my hand."

"You're not fair to him," I cried. "He's fonder of you than you think."

"I was only chaffing, and I am truly grateful to him; you know that!"

We sat by the fire, already a little like lovers, and my heart was fairly bursting with joy. At the back of my mind, to be sure, there were many destructive thoughts waiting to get in and capture my happy heart, but even this knowledge didn't spoil the happiness I felt and the sense of peace I had found at having at last said out what for so long had been in my heart. And as I look aside at Effie where she sits in all her splendour and beauty I promise myself that I will never forget this moment when her whole value is clear to me, and that I will never vary in my appreciation and gratitude of her true worth, or for a moment allow trouble or fear to stamp it out of my mind.

So a month passed, and I talked again to Effie, and she agreed, and Minister came and we discussed the plan of how best to do it. I was all for going to Edinburgh and posting the banns there and getting married there, but Effie thought no.

"If we did that we couldn't get married before Christmas, for you have a holiday then. We couldn't go to Edinburgh and back in one day, and they would never give you a holiday to marry me. Besides, my child may be born by then."

So it was decided the banns were to be posted in Durkie. Minister would attend to that, and he would marry us in his house. I was somewhat distressed by this and I felt weak inside when I thought of the hue and cry that would go up in Durkie and how fingers would point at me and how words would be thrown at me just as soon as the banns were posted, and they have to be posted for two weeks before you can get married.

Effie knew what I was feeling, for she said to me:

"Even if we got married in Edinburgh we would always have to face coming back. It's much better to declare yourself in the first place than leave folk to guess at things by themselves."

So it was decided, and on Sunday Minister will announce it from the pulpit.

"You don't have to go to church on Sunday, John, so don't let it fret you," said Effie.

We were sitting around the fire having our tea and talking things over. "We three," said Minister, "will always be friends, and that, after all, is all that matters. It's you, Effie, and John and me, and what could be finer?" We were the three of us mellow and all talked-out and inclined to be sentimental. I had given up thinking of my fears for the present and I sat in that calm, happy state that one sometimes gets into when one has a task to do on the morrow that seems beyond the powers. It's an instinctive state, I think, and I was very grateful for it. I think we were all in its power, for the silence that hung around us was soft and calm; it was motionless and yet you felt that you floated on it. I closed my eyes and gave myself up to it. Oh, it was peaceful and kind; Effie and Minister and me with our arms around each other and our heads on each other's shoulders, drowsily asleep, standing knee-high in a warm cloud. You've seen two horses standing in a rich pasture on a summer evening with their necks hanging low and their faces touching, dreaming or sleeping, I know not which. It felt like that.

There came suddenly like a bullet into this silence a knock on the front door. It was like a stone that is thrown into the centre of a still pool. I felt as if my heart had been speared out of my body and hung on the spear point, aching and moving. While we still

looked at each other in wonder (for who could it be?) the knock was made again, and while it still sounded, Effie moved to answer it. I thought of Fiddler and I thought of Stranger. I never thought of Mistress Weir, but it was she, and she had brought with her a woman whose name turned out to be Mistress Ferguson. She was fat, and her loud breathing showed how nervous she was.

They seated themselves with us by the fire. Mistress Weir had been taken aback when she saw Minister and me, but an expression of determination overcame her look of surprise and she said: "Good evening to you both," in a voice that made clear the contempt that she felt for us on finding us there. It was as if she had come on us both drunk in church.

"I thought mebbe you'd be alone," she said to Effie.

"This is my house, Mistress Weir," answered Effie. "You will have to take it as you find it."

"I had something to ask you, Effie Gallows," said Mistress Weir.

"If you care to say it before them and they care to stay and hear it, they are welcome," said Effie.

"The more as hears it the better; but I warn you, Effie Gallows, it's a serious matter."

"I know that as well as any," said Effie, "and I wish you to know that I will be honest with you and answer you anything you might want to know."

"Honesty, Effie Gallows, is a word that dies in your mouth."

"That's no fair," said Effie. "You will see that all I tell you I tell you against myself; since it's bad enough you cannot doubt its truth."

Mistress Weir made a movement of impatience. She was bitter and one felt she was incapable of mercy. Effie, on the other hand, was determined to be calm, and by her calmness she showed that she recognized to its full extent how justified Mistress Weir was in her accusation and her hatred. It was a brave stand, even though its quality wouldn't be taken into consideration or any charity be meted out on that account. I thanked God that Minister and I happened to be there even though it would be told against us tomorrow.

The heavy woman, Mistress Ferguson, breathed loudly through it all. She said nothing and I suppose she wasn't brought to say anything, but more I suppose as a witness or a protection for Mistress Weir against Effie. This fact shook me for a moment, for it proved to me how general the feeling against Effie must have become, and how much it must be talked of, for here was a strange woman brought in—at least strange to me, not one of the well thought of or ruling women in the village, but one that I was hardly aware of. I looked at her with anger. She dropped her

eyes and turned her head from my look, and continued her breathing in that direction.

"You're with child, Effie Gallows," said Mistress Weir.

"That's plain to see," said Effie.

"It's afore its time," said Mistress Weir.

"Aye," said Effie, "it was conceived before my wedding."

"They're blaming Ernest, my son that's dead, for it. I know that to be a lie."

"Aye, it is a lie," said Effie.

"My son wouldna have done that. I know my son couldna have done that, no matter how you wheedled him."

"It wasn't him," said Effie. "You're right, it's a lie."

"That was why you married my son, Effie Gallows —to save your face?"

"Aye," said Effie, "to save my face."

"Did my son know he was marrying a whore, Effie Gallows?"

Effie looked as if she had been struck in the face, but she gathered herself together and said simply: "No, I didn't tell him."

Mistress Weir's hands were clasped tightly in her lap and the veins stood out so high that you could see the blood beat in them. "You took him for a

fool," she said, "and you took me for a fool, too? Then you had my son killed. You didn't need him any more, so you had him killed!"

"No," said Effie, "that's not true. I know nothing of that."

"Do you know who killed him, Effie Gallows?"

"He was killed in a fight. You know it as well as I do," she answered.

"Was Fiddler your lover?"

"I never saw him before my wedding," said Effie.

I held my breath. Was Mistress Weir going to speak of the stranger? Would Effie tell her; would she be mad enough to tell her? But she didn't, for apparently, like most in the village, she hadn't noticed him and if she had, she didn't connect him with Effie. After all, he was only around during the fair and there were so many other strangers also. But she wasn't satisfied yet; there was more that she wanted to know, so she spat out at Effie: "Who is your lover?" Effie said nothing.

"Mebbe there was more than one," said Mistress Weir, in her bitter, shaky voice.

"No," said Effie, still calm, "there was but one, but I will not tell you his name."

"And why will you not tell me his name, Effie Gallows, since you promised to tell me the truth?"

"Because," said Effie, "his name belongs to him;

it doesn't belong to me, nor has it anything to do with you."

"Well, it's plain that he thought so much of his name that he kept it from you and your bastard. You would hide his name, but you wouldn't mind spitting on my son's name. You're a true whore, Effie Gallows. They always stick to those that spits on them."

You may think that through all this Minister or I might have put in a word for Effie. That's true in a sense, and once or twice I was sorely tempted to, but Effie's will was stronger than ours and I got the feeling very strongly from her that she wished no help and no words from either of us. This was in a way her trial and she was glad to have it over, and she was willing to stand anything that this old woman cared to call her, for she knew what her feelings were and that they were justified.

Mistress Weir seemed to have done, for she rose suddenly and with jerky movements she pulled her shawl around her. Mistress Ferguson followed her and walked in her shadow like a dog with its master. They left the room without a word to either of us. Effie followed and opened the front door for them; then she came into the room again, gone suddenly all limp. "I feel so dirty," she said; then she sat down and leaned her head on her hand and cried simply in a heartbroken way as a child might.

We both stood by her and tried to comfort her with, "Hush, dear Effie; don't cry, Effie," and the like. We felt very helpless and uncouth, and what to say I couldn't think; but she grew gradually calmer, then lifted up her head and tried to smile at us. She said: "I am sorry for this, but I think it will do me good; and besides I couldn't help it."

VI

THE next two weeks were hard for me. I may have looked calm enough on the outside, but inside I was burning up with undecided emotions or quaking with self-consciousness. I felt the eyes of every man, woman, and child in the whole of Durkie glued on me wherever I went, and it was so. They followed me with their eyes unmercifully and without shame; there was no rest from them, no cranny I could go into to be free of the direct attack of the many eyes. Even in my bed with the lights out I felt unhidden and naked. Worst of all was to walk down the high street on my way to school. I felt entangled in eyes. They were not looks of reproach that I got; that would have been easier to deal with; they were

just looks. I was being looked at for the first time in my life. They had never thought of me before nor considered me as a person in my own right. They never imagined for a second that I could ever do anything of my own wish. They were amazed and shocked and overcome with curiosity about me, they are seeing me for the first time.

What they have decided about me I don't know, and I don't think that they are sure in their own minds what to think, whether I am bad or depraved or simply deluded or have been taken in, whether they will lay my actions at Effie's door and hate her the more, or whether I am to take my place with Effie and be treated as no better. They haven't made up their minds yet. Meanwhile I suffer and quake and search their faces for the answer; why, I can't say. I feel myself superior to every one of them. I know that by marrying Effie I am gaining rewards and pleasures and honours far beyond their imaginings, more even than I myself could ever appreciate. Why then do I shiver and suffer this feeling of self-abasement? Why can't I be proud as I ought to be? Are my own standards not enough for me? I know, for example, that if in the security of my room I had managed to lift the heavy weight that the strong man at the fair did with so much effort, if I had lifted it up and held it high over my head as he had done, I know how I would

be possessed with pride in myself. I wouldn't have to boast of it in the village or prove it to the doubtful. I know myself that I have done it, I know my strength, I have no doubt of it. Then why can't I feel the same way about this? I know my Effie's worth, I know that it is no disgrace to marry her, and yet I go about ashamed, not of myself, it's true, but of what they think of me. It's a pitiful and weak thing not to be able to stand by yourself, but I am as I am, and no amount of logic can alter my feelings.

When I am living in the Grey House it will be different, I'll have Effie beside me for comfort and company, I'll rest in her strength, I'll unconsciously copy her strength, I'll not mind the high street or the giggles of the schoolroom, for I'll have Effie to go back to, and all my lack will be made sufficient by her overpowering completeness.

It's as if I were a weak trickle of a drying stream that in the end feels the comfort of being caught up by the strong, all-devouring sea, lost in the sea but part of the sea; twisted and torn by its storms, but safe and rich and full of quiet music when calm sets in. Oh, it's well worth it, well worth the loss of my little winding ways and my creeping through narrow banks. I'll miss the feel of the flower's face on my surface, it's true, and the running over little stones; but I'll have so much to take their place. If I

say that I'll have too much, I mean it humbly and gratefully.

No one mentioned my coming marriage to me, no one even hinted that he knew about it. This showed in a way how much they must have talked behind my back and just how they felt about it, for the more they felt and the stronger they felt, the less they would say to my face. Now mind you, these are people that I had been born amongst and brought up amongst, not strangers, yet not one has yet broken words with me on the subject most vital to me.

Two days before my marriage to Effie, I was walking back from having seen her. She had been kind and peaceful, waiting on me and smiling on me and saying to me: "I'll be very happy to marry you, John, for I am very lonely. I'll be glad when Saturday comes." For that was the day we were to get married. As I left, she had said: "Don't come again before Saturday. It'll be all the nicer for not having seen you." So I walked down the hill, feeling at peace and happy to have meant so much to her.

The moon was like a spit in the sky, so thin and formless, the clouds were all about. The trees, now bare of leaves, grasped at the damp air with long black fingers that looked like thin iron bars. I walked under

the naked trees and the dripping moon on the same road that I had walked so often lately, but more alive to my surroundings than usual, as one is when one does a thing for the last time. For this was the last time that I would leave Effie's house for mine. My house was to go; it was much too small for the two of us, having but two rooms. I didn't regret leaving it, it wasn't that; but it gives a strange feeling to realize that one is about to cut off a customary action from one's life forever. After tonight I will never walk this stretch of road coming from Effie's house to my house again. I'll walk the Durkie road again, of course, often, but it will never be like this again, never from Effie's house to my house, for I'll have no house.

I was lost in this thought and the pleasurable sense of melancholy it gave me, so I didn't see Mistress Weir until she was close to me. She stretched out her hand to have me stop; she held it so, and it fluttered like a rag in a strong wind.

"I have known you all your life, John. My son Ernest liked you well. You're well thought of in Durkie; you're about to marry Effie Gallows. Now bide a wee; wait until I have finished." For I was about to walk on. "I knew your mother well, too. I know how she would feel about this; I know she would thank me for telling you this, for she loved you well."

"My mother is dead! She's been dead these last six years. She knows nothing of this nor does she care. I am a man and I can help myself, Mistress Weir; I know what I am doing and I know I want to do it. And I know, furthermore, that it's not kindness as you would make me believe that makes you want to talk to me, but a desire to hurt me because I happen to like Effie Gallows, whom I know to be a fine woman in spite of your feelings about her."

"How can you stand there and say that, when my son is still fresh in his grave?" she screamed at me.

"Did Effie Gallows put him there? Find who killed him and rant about them, but leave Effie Gallows alone. She never meant you any harm; you know that as well as I do."

The fluttering hand had landed like a vulture on my arm. "You're fair bewitched! You're the way Ernest was. But mind, young lad, if Ernest is dead, it's for the same reason that you're marrying Effie Gallows. And since you profit by Ernest's death, there'll be someone to profit by yours. I tell you now, if my days were to be numbered for it, that if you marry Effie Gallows you might as well dig your grave and hers, aye, and the bairn's, too." She said this insolently and defiantly, as if she had authority to say it. My heart was beating hard, but I was determined to talk this thing out.

"What right have you to say such things, Mistress Weir? No one has the power to say what will be; you can't take it upon yourself."

"I know how God works," she answered. "I know His ways; I know that you can't traffic with the Devil, and not be destroyed in the end! I have never seen it to fail; you canna be evil and live; aye, and you canna mix with evil-doers and not become like them."

"Then you know who is evil, do you? How do you know that, Mistress Weir?"

"By the trouble they cause," she answered.

"But in my eyes, Mistress Weir, you yourself are out to make trouble."

"Only because it's right. Nobody has ever thought to cause me trouble. I am a good woman, and it's given to the good to know the evil."

There was nothing you could say to that, so I said nothing; there would be no point in standing arguing with Mistress Weir on her own goodness, so, since she had taken her hand off my arm and it was back in the folds of her shawl, it seemed a chance to go. She caught my desire and with a nod of her head she made it easy, but before she let me go she looked me in the face and said in a voice that was metallic through the tremors and shakes: "Well, it's good-bye then! We'll not be speaking again." I nodded, and she went her way, which was in the direction opposite to mine.

But of a sudden she turned back. "Will you be going on at the schoolhouse?" she asked.

I was caught by the suggestion. "And why for no?" I demanded.

"It's a long walk from the Grey House yonder to the schoolhouse."

"I am a very good walker, Mistress Weir, and with your leave I'll say good-bye." So we left each other and went on our separate ways.

I was fairly stunned by what her remark had suggested. Would they dare do that, could they do it, could they take the school away from me, could they force me to leave on account of marrying Effie? What excuse would they give? I've always been well thought of. They were very proud to have a Durkie man for a teacher. How often they have said to me: "We're real proud of you, John; it's such a comfort not to have one of those Edinburgh men teaching the bairns?" The children like me, too. No, I can't believe it; it seems too strange; but why did Mistress Weir think of it? If she thought of it, they'll all think of it—they're all alike. The life had all gone out of me, for I began to realize that it was quite likely to happen, and teaching school means a great deal to me. Take that away from me and what have I left? I'd be lost. I never realized before how much it meant to me. Oh, what am I to do? But then, I am probably making too much of

a lather about it. It probably will never happen; anyhow I can wait and see, and I am going to marry Effie, to marry Effie! no matter what may happen. Let them turn me out of school, let them do all they can. I'll be married to Effie, that's all I care. They can't hurt my feeling for Effie, no matter what they do.

Of course it's easy to see that in all this that I am protesting a little too much, but that's how it is. I would always like things to be pleasant and easy—it's a common fault. I can never quite get it into my head that for everything you get you have something taken from you, too. Unless, of course, you can be content with half-measures, there's no way of avoiding payment for full measure.

Saturday came at last. It was one of those wanton crotchety days that belong to no season, a day on its own. It was warm, yet clear as a diamond, tainted with just enough frost to kindle the blood. I cut out across the fields, over little tufted hills and among the languid grasses that caught in the laces of my boots; between the hawthorn hedges on which the withered flowers still hung, I walked, and under my breath I sang.

I laughed outright to see the docile, simple-minded rabbits limp towards me, caught by the sound of my

voice. I grew to searching on the hillside, thinking that could I find a twist of white heather this day would have been noticed by the lucky gods and my luck foretold, but none did I find. I wasn't at all put out by it, still it would have been fine to appear on Effie's doorstep with a sprig of white heather in my hand on our wedding day. But it was just a silly fancy; I had luck enough for any man today.

Now we walk, Effie and I together, her hand on my arm. Her breath comes thick, and walking is effort for her since she is heavy with child, but she is gay and light-hearted and laughs at her heaviness.

"If I were free of this burden I could beat you to the minister's."

"Have you no sense of proportion, Effie?" I said to her. "It wouldn't be seemly for you to arrive at the minister's before me."

"How can I have a sense of proportion?" she laughs back. "Look at me!"

There is no road to take to the minister's house that doesn't go through the village street, so as we come near, I fight to keep from showing any sign of nervousness, but the folk there were about seemed to take no notice of us. It was put on, of course, but even so, I was grateful for it. What signs they made behind our backs I cannot say, but I can guess.

The minister's door was opened to our knock by

his housewife, who smiled kindly at us, and so pleasant was it to have a strange woman smile at us on our wedding day that Effie and I looked at each other with wonder and joy in our eyes, and as we walked down the hall, Effie whispered in my ear: "She's the grandest old woman I have ever seen."

It was strange to be sitting solemnly with Minister. He had his vestments on, which gave him an air of aloofness. He was telling us what to do and when to say: "Yes, I do," but more to me than Effie, since she had done it before.

Minister went to the door and called softly: "You can come in now," and in came the nice old woman with an old man. They stood this side of the door, he with his eyes on the floor, but she smiled at us as she had done before. Then we went and stood together in the little space between the bay windows as Minister told us to. He pushed me gently this way and that, placing me, then Effie; then the old man and the old woman sidled up as if they were glued together and stood where they were told. Then Minister faced us with the open Bible in his hand, out of which a purple ribbon hung. What the words of the service are I will never know, for I heard none of them, but by some miracle I managed to say "I do" in time, and slide the heavy gold band that was my mother's on Effie's hand. Then we kissed, gently, as children might,

and Minister shook me by the hand, and suddenly we were free again, free to behave like living people. I signed the certificate, so did Effie, and then the old man and the old woman, both of them, when their time came, breathing heavily and painfully, for it was plainly a difficult task for them to write their names. Then we shook their hands and the nice old woman said: "I wish you happiness, both of you," and we thanked her kindly.

The three of us sat by the fire and had a glass of wine with many fine cakes that the old woman had baked for us. We were none of us free or natural yet, but it was a happy restraint and full of relief.

Effie and I walked arm in arm through the village. Everyone knew us to be newly married, but no one took any notice of us or spoke to us. Not one smiled or made a friendly gesture in our direction. We walked alone in silence, like two strangers in an indifferent and uniform town. It was hurting, but since we knew the reason, we could ignore it. Past the last cottage we found an opening in the stone dike that bordered the road and walked across the grass. We mounted a soft hill and sat down upon a flat stone. It was quiet and peaceful beyond measure; the sun shone warmly but dimly in our faces, the grass was all around us. The

sun's warmth had stirred false life in its veins, and it had that delicate, timorous, fruitless radiance that is at the same time so lovely and so sad. From east to west a single dreamy white cloud was making its way vacantly, unemotionally over the throbbing blue sky. A bird gave a cry that hung like a heavy tear over our heads. I turned to Effie and tears were in her eyes.

"I could have given you so much," she said. "I could have come to you fresh and fine. I am a thief to you; I have taken all the true beauty out of your life, all the virgin beauty. As a man you have been cheated; you won't get lost in the new green woods, the words you hear from me will not be your words, sung for you, but old and out of memory. It's like this day, beautiful only in echo, dressed in false cloth, stolen by the summer's carelessness, a remnant from the summer's train. Will you forgive me? Will you put your hand on my head and tell me that even so, I will be of use to you, that you do still love my tired heart and my tired soul?"

I put my arm around her. Tears were in my eyes also, for I knew what she meant, and it was true all she said, and I knew that to pretend anything else would be to insult her honesty. So I said what I knew to be true for me and sufficient for me.

"I love you, Effie, better than myself; I love you as a bird must love a tree, for shelter and beauty. I need

you to live and to be happy; and without sadness, what is joy? I love you, and knowledge has nothing to do with it nor the years past or the years to be. Make your own laws, Effie, decide on the good or the bad, and I will abide by them, for your world is enough for me and I have no wish and no understanding outside of your making."

Her head was on my shoulder; her tired eyes were closed, and under my hand I felt her child stir. The white cloud had reached the sun's edge and was sailing on regardless of its heat.

By and by we got up and walked on, and shortly we were at Effie's gate. We mounted the path but we did not go in, but went to the back of the house, to stay in the sun as long as it lasted. We stood among the orchard trees; the ground was strewn with fallen apples that had rotted but still held their form.

I said to Effie: "Next year we'll gather in the apples; we won't let them die on the ground. I'll build a seat around this tree and we can sit here."

She seemed lost in thought. "If my child is a girl, I'll call it Spring, and if it's a boy, I'll call it Summer," she said, "and the three of us will sit in the orchard and gather in the apples when the time comes; and it won't be Gallows orchard any more, it will be your orchard, John, for it was your idea, and you will make the wooden seat that we're to sit on, and you'll

tell me how to keep the trees in health so that the apples will be sweet and red and not fall too soon as they have done before."

The rest of the day was spent simply and quietly. As long as the sun held out we stayed in it talking and taking gentle walks around. Then when the sun left us, we entered the house and Effie took me from room to room, talking of things that had happened in them—the room her father had died in, the chair in which he had sat when he felt death creeping on him, and how she had put her arms around him and pressed his head on her breast, then lifted him bodily and carried him over to the bed when he felt a need to lie down, and he had said: "Effie, I have come to port," and closed his eyes and died—how she had stood and looked on him and noticed the look of cruel peacefulness that came over his face, and that the hair of his beard looked so terribly alive against his dead face. Then she had gone downstairs and sat by herself for a full day, trying to understand what had happened and that now she was quite alone; and she told me how she had sat with him all night, not at all afraid to be alone in the house with a dead man. "I knew him so well," she said; "how could I feel afraid of him?"

Every room was full of some memory or other and she wove, by her stories of the things that had happened in each one, a character for it, just as definite as

though the room had been a living place. "When I was a wee girl, this was where I liked most to play," she said.

"Why?" I asked, for it was a bare, gloomy room.

"Because it's a small room," she had answered, simply.

I felt a tightening at my throat, for I understood of a sudden how as a little girl she must have felt; the world must have seemed a great, lonely place to a wee girl with no mother and not a child to play with, a small room less frightening and less lonely.

Through the rooms we went and each one was christened before my eyes and given a name, till the Grey House seemed alive and breathing to me and the rooms hung together as the verses of a poem do, bound by a free tensity both sad and gay, and through them all like a mist seeped Effie's love for her father and this his house, and her tenderness for this arrangement of rooms that had sheltered her childhood. She laid her hand on the fading wall and all the lines of the pattern seemed to run to the hand or hung like happy garlands around her head. I knew that I would always be as a stranger to this house, but I felt no resentment, and no need to be treated but as an onlooker. I felt I could squeeze out enough to live on at ease in the fact of Effie's love for this house.

We ate our simple meals on the scrubbed kitchen

table, by the warmth of the kitchen fire. I dried the dishes for Effie and placed the plates one by one on the dresser racks. I noticed how clean and of what a silvery texture the wood of the dresser was, through strong and frequent scrubbings. The copper of the pans that hung on the wall shone like the brass on a well kept boat. I emptied the water from the dishpan, scattering it through the dark onto the grass that grew on either side of the back door, then I dipped from the rain-barrel a pail of water against tomorrow, and brought it to the kitchen. Effie had finished and on the line hung the dish-clout, sweet and clean. She loosed the apron from her mis-shapen waist and so we looked at each other, for it was the first chore we had worked in common. We sat by the fire, our hands held together, indescribably at peace. I turned my head often to look at the room I sat in, for I felt still strange and excited at my being there at all. At Effie I didn't dare look.

We rose at last, for the time to sleep had come. Slowly we mounted the stairs, for such things were hard on Effie. In one hand I carried the lamp, in the other I held her hand still, in quiet tenderness. I made her sit while I knelt and slipped carefully the shoes from her feet, thinking to myself as I did it: "This I will always do." I turned down the sheets of the bed and again I said to myself: "This I will always do,"

and when at last we lay side by side, I kissed her through my tears that were given half in joy at being there and half in sorrow that it should have been at such a time. I lay the night through without sleep, peering into her face when the desire struck me, looking at her length by my side, struck always afresh by the reality of it all, touching her coloured hair that rose like flames from her head.

And when the dawn came and I could see more clearly the details of her face I studied her lashes, how strong and black they were and how evenly set in. I was delighted and excited to discover that hair grew in the hollow of her nostrils and that her ears were carved like strong designs in ivory, and that on the flat of her chest just before the breasts swelled up, went spreading out an exquisite tree shape whose slight sensitive branches were fine blue veins. I closed my eyes at times to dream of these things and to close my mind like a vice on many others which I knew to be there but which I did not think it wise at this time to think on, but knowing in the rush of pleasure that the very prohibition afforded that the time would come and they were mine.

When she awoke she looked at me and smiled, and so we lay smiling at each other, and the day was fair

like yesterday, and the sun made its way across the floor and threw a languid arm across our drowsy bodies and bound us together. And so we lay, content and happy.

I might go on from day to day telling you of my happiness, and many pleasing little things that happened, but there would be no point in this and it might try your patience, for things that in my present lover-mood might seem full of meaning for me you would find empty. So you know that I am very happy and things go well with me, and nothing has happened to distress us. I have suffered a few tremors of discomfort, it's true, passing through the village, and sometimes have felt that the bearing of my pupils toward me bordered on insolence, but I admit to myself that I am oversensitive, so I put it out of my mind.

We have been married a week come tomorrow, which is Saturday.

VII

IT was strange to have Minister pacing up and down the kitchen, to watch him fight against what he had to say and struggle with the words he had to say it with, to put his words in such an order that they would seem less cruel to me. He had come to tell me that I had to resign from teaching at the school. This I knew the minute I saw his face. Just how they had made up their minds that I had to resign and how they had approached Minister with it, I was eager to know. I wanted all the facts, desperately. Why, I can't say. I wasn't exactly hurt; I felt dead and aloof, although my heart beat hard.

I could hear Effie coming downstairs. I saw her at the door, I saw her look at Minister, then she came

straight over to me and put her hand on my arm and looked in my face. Still I felt nothing. I looked on Effie coldly, not because I blamed her, but because I felt nothing.

Minister had turned to us helplessly, his arms dangling by his side. "It's been decided," he said sadly.

"Aye, we know all about that," I put in quickly, for I had a sudden horror of hearing the words said.

Minister sat down in a lump on a chair and put his hand over his eyes. "I cannot understand people at all," he said. "It's beyond me. Why are they so cruel?" he cried. "Why can they not let a person be?"

"It's kill or get killed," said Effie.

"It's a puzzle to me," said Minister. "Don't think badly of me, John, for being willing to come and tell you this; but if I hadn't, someone else would have done it, and I argued it was better for me to tell you than someone who would enjoy the task."

I did feel sorry for him; his eyes looked hurt.

"When do I have to leave?" I asked of him.

"They are sending to Edinburgh for someone to take your place."

"But until he arrives?" I asked.

"They're closing up the school until the new teacher comes."

I was relieved not to have to face the schoolroom again, yet there was something so ignoble and so

insulting about the suddenness of it; it was almost like being dragged out of bed and thrown into jail without even time to dress.

"So," said Effie bitterly, "they would rather close up school than have John there for another day? The poor, filthy rats! So they think that their brats will be hurt by being in the same room with a person like John? The fools, don't they know how lucky they have been to have a man like John in the same room with their trash?"

"Effie, Effie, don't!" cried Minister, for what she said she said to him.

Her face was white and distorted with rage, and she was shaking all over. "Tell them," she said, stretching out the fingers of her hands like claws, "tell them that they're lost; tell them that they are damned! Tell them that they are idiot fools, that their minds are foul with disease and their bodies stink with dirt! Tell them, Minister, from me, that they can tear us limb from limb; they can cover us with spit if they want; but they can never touch us; they can never come near us. Tell them that John is happy to leave them and that he can teach them nothing, for they're all alike, they and their children, and it dirties him to come near them." She turned to leave the room, for she was shaking all over. When she reached the door she turned round and looked at me fiercely.

"That's true, isn't it, John?" she said. "It's true, all that I said? You want to leave?" She wasn't begging, she was demanding to know. I think that if I had answered no or even hesitated she would have lost all friendship for me. So, knowing this well enough and having been stirred by her emotion, I nodded and said firmly: "Aye, you're right."

I heard her mount the stairs slowly. To Minister I said: "Was it Mistress Weir who spoke to you about this?"

"Yes," he said, "she and some others."

"Did they come to your house about it?"

"No," he said, "last Sunday after service."

I was struck dumb. "Last Sunday!" I said. "As far back as that? Is that why you stayed away from us all of the week through?"

"Yes," he said sadly.

"Then by rights I ought not to have been teaching all last week!"

"No, that's not true," he said. "I told them I would tell you today and not before."

"Why did you do that?" I asked.

"I wanted you to have this week to be with Effie without this coming into your happiness."

I thanked him kindly, for I could see how well he meant, but I couldn't but think with shame that I had been right when I felt the children's rudeness toward

me. And after all, if he had told me of this right off I should have been spared their contempt and now this feeling of hurt pride; but I know he meant it for the best and after all that is all that counts.

There seemed no more to say about it all, and yet to talk of anything else would seem nonsense, and I was still aching inside and incapable of thinking of anything else, so I asked Minister to tell me how it had happened. It was miserable enough and contemptible enough and we agreed that they were pathetic wretches in their attempts to gloss their doings with some semblance of dignity.

He got to describing the comical side of their conduct, the phrasing of their words, which he said reminded him very much of a speech he had heard the mayor make when the King had come to Edinburgh. We grew quite gay and laughed a little and I felt better already. I went to the foot of the stairs to call on Effie, for I wanted her to share in this. She came down and took one look at us, and like a wise woman she decided to do all in her power to stay this happy state, so out came the best wine and the crystal glasses.

"It's from Madeira," she said. "My father brought it."

So we drank, not with the intention of drowning our sorrows so much as floating our joy, and well on through the night it went on. The fire flashed on the

glasses and Effie walked back and forth through our talk, getting supper, tidying up, filling our glasses, ever kind and wise, even entering a little into our coarseness when we felt a need of asserting our masculinity. Then to give us greater freedom she left us to ourselves, kissing me gently on the cheek as she left and the same to Minister, for he showed plainly he wanted it. And I, in my warm, wine-lit mood, would have demanded that she kiss him, so generous and fine I felt.

It was well on three hours later when Minister rose to go. We were somewhat timid of each other, for we had talked more frankly than was our custom, and somehow his rising to go wrenched us violently from the plane of personal glorification where we had been roaming and landed us firmly on the ground of our normal country, where thoughts were thoughts and not to be put into words. So Minister stood first on one foot and then the other, vaguely uncomfortable and out of practice for the usual word to say; I, for myself, was sunk; I lay in my chair in the sprawling attitude that through the hours I had slowly reached, and I looked with eyes that vaguely tried to discover some significant form on the corrugations of my waistcoat that were forced by the creases of my relaxed

belly beneath. Minister wavered toward me; he was white as a sheet, for like me, he was no hand at heavy drinking. I tried to count the emptied bottles on the table, a gesture toward self-reproach, but they eluded me. I wasn't drunk; my mind itself was very clear, but things seemed far away.

Minister was saying triumphantly: "And so our Lord turned the water into wine."

So that was worrying him. "We're a fine couple of men," I thought. "Can't we drink a couple of bottles of wine without calling on God to justify us? But of course, being a minister is different—"

His hand was coming heavily through the air toward me; I watched it the way you might watch a wounded bird drop to earth. It landed within a half-inch of mine and through my foggy brain came the word that we were to shake hands. I turned my hand and our hands met and it felt to me that these were not human hands but hands of huge proportions and alive on their own account. Now I must get up, for Minister was surely going, and this seemed to me a struggle far beyond my strength. But there, I was up, and I can't remember doing it; and I am watching Minister making his way thinly down the path. I locked the door and put out the light and felt for the banister with my overactive hand.

Half-way up the stair I stopped and stood, all the

trimmings gone from me; for I suddenly thought of what had happened to me, how my work had been taken from me—I thought of my diploma that I had won in Edinburgh and my black cloak and my black hat with a slate in it, and what they had meant to me when I had first worn them, how in some lyrical way I had felt that I was a better man than my neighbour. And now I was made foolish and the dignity taken from me; for what is a king without a country? Then there was sheer fear too, for I had never done wrong before in the eyes of my neighbours, nor had to stand punishment. I walked up the rest of the stairs, cowed by the realization of what had happened to me. My hand had become part of the rest of me once more. I was sober again and heavy with misery.

I thought of Effie. She was a woman, just a woman, that was all; and, fight against it as much as I tried, I had to admit to myself that she was to blame. Even if I didn't care, she was to blame, and if I cared terribly she was to blame. And yet I could feel no resentment, for she knew this fact clearer than I did and suffered by it more than I ever could. I felt a sudden rush of pity for her; for her there was no escape; the wrong she had done when she had married Ernest would stay with her, her life through. At the name of Ernest I grew cold all over, for here was I climbing the same stairs that he had climbed, and at the end of the stairs

was the same bed and Effie in it. Why this fact had never struck me before I cannot say, but it never had in quite this way. I was half inclined to turn back, and at the same moment I laughed outright at myself.

"What's got into me?" I thought. "I know my own mind, don't I? Have I forgotten so soon that I am living with Effie Gallows, that I count it a privilege? Let them keep their school." And I threw my arm in the air describing a gesture of contempt so recklessly, so proudly that I was half turned around by its force and caught myself in time from falling down the stairs. I am not as sober as I thought; that proved it to me. Well, in a way it excuses my moment's unfaithfulness to Effie and, given back my self-respect on that account, I march up the rest of the stairs with determination made easy by relief.

The next day being Sunday, I did not miss the schoolroom, but next morning and the days that came after felt vacant and thin and seemed to have no point and no meaning, and my body felt like a shadow the whole day through, tor my heart and thoughts were by habit in the schoolroom: "Two and two are four," and "When was the battle of Bannockburn?" and such nonsense. Yet it was my little say in life and it had been taken away from me. I avoided as much as I

could Effie's eyes, which were on me continually. Yet she said nothing of what was passing in her mind and made no attempt to comfort me. And so the days passed and if, to be fair, they lacked motive, they were calm and restful and full of peace.

VIII

EFFIE'S time is near, I think, for she has an air of waiting about her; and tomorrow I will walk to the village and make arrangements for Mistress Murry, who is the midwife, to come and stay and prepare for her lying-in.

The weather was bad now, black and sour. Winter had set in and life had retired as far as the eye could see from all living tree and bush. The nights came down fast and lay like a burden on the cowed earth. One tore oneself away from the fire reluctantly and crept into bed shaking with cold.

I lay with my arms around Effie, my head by her

head, waiting till she should fall asleep, when I would draw my arms away from her quietly not to wake her. I am restless at night and find it hard to sleep close to another. I marvel at Effie's gift for sleeping at once. She smiles, closes her eyes, and is asleep. In this she is akin to the animals, and on waking it is the same; she opens her eyes and smiles, and so she is awake, clear-eyed and fresh, with no lazy mist hanging around her head. My way is different, for sleep must be approached on tiptoes, wooed delicately and possessed faintly, and on awaking she clings to my fingers weakly and breathes amorously on my eyes, and to escape her I must shake her off as if she were a filthy thing. And so we sleep together, two such different people, each one with our separate approach to the silent state. But as we are covered layer on layer by grey, drowning sleep-dust and drawn down from a shape on the surface to something of no shape in the timeless, colourless vault beneath, we are as one. I am closer to the one I love and she to me, far, far beyond what can ever be felt in waking moments; close and warm, I am entangled with her and she with me, wrought together, not by our apparent similarities but by this positive, swarming nothingness. . . .

Through folds of thick sleep came, like a distorted dream, the consciousness of vague movements troub-

ling my calm, and I opened my eyes at last and found Effie peering into my face. Her eyes were wild and the lines of her face were drawn with pain!

"I think my time has come," she said. "You'd best get the midwife."

I ran about the room putting on my clothes, looking at Effie when I could spare the time. She was lying with her hands clenched, her head tossing from side to side. "It's a strange feeling, John." And she smiled at me a quick, white smile that was torn at once from her face by a twist of pain.

I was lacing my boots with shaking fingers.

"What time is it, John?"

"It's on four," I said.

"I can't lie down any more," she said. "I feel a need to move about."

I helped her up and she clung to me in that strange impersonal way that sick people have when their minds are on their pain.

"Come down, Effie dear, with me and I'll light the fire for you. You can stay by the fire; it will be nicer for you." I was talking to her as if she were a little child in trouble. So I covered her up with my great-coat and put my arm round her. Her hands were wet with cold sweat and she moaned little gentle moans.

"You mustn't mind these," she said. "It's not as bad as that, but it comforts me somewhat—" She walked as if her feet were sunk in mud and she had to pull

them out with great effort. "I wonder will it take long," she half whimpered.

All I could do was to say: "There, my dear; you'll be all right. I know it won't last long."

The fire was always set the night before, so all I had to do was to put a light to it, praying to myself as I did so that it would catch at once. I sat Effie on one of the big chairs and wrapped her legs and feet in a plaid and she let her hand fall limply on mine as I did so by way of thanks.

"It's not so bad now," she said. "I feel better here."

I put on the kettle, and on the hearth I put the teapot, and on the table by her side a cup. "When the kettle boils you can make yourself a cup of tea."

She smiled. "Thank you, John. That'll be fine."

I kissed her on the cheek. "I won't be long; I'll be right back. It will soon warm up in here. I'll be right back."

I ran down the path, clutching the neck of my coat around my throat to keep the cold out, for Effie had my greatcoat. The gate stuck and I rattled it in a frenzy of haste. It suddenly gave as if it had never been stuck at all and I ran down the Durkie road as if I'd been chased by demons. A horse in the field by the side of the road scampered and ran alongside of me, tossing its head with pleasure. I was resentful of him; he seemed somehow, by his running by me and his

passing of me, to keep me back. "Oh, don't do that," I cried with rage. He stopped as if he had been struck on the brow and bent his head and touched the ground with his mouth and stayed that way as if he had been a wooden horse.

I came at last to Mistress Murry's house and pounded on the door with my knuckles. There seemed to be no sign of life and I pounded with my fists. I listened with my ear at the keyhole and still there was no stirring; I kicked with my boot, I rattled the handle, I called through the keyhole: "Hey, Mistress Murry!" Then I thought I heard something, and sure enough, my heart leapt with relief. I could hear the slush-slush of carpeted feet coming along the hall.

The door was opened to a crack and the chain was put on, then the crack of the door widened to the chain's full length, and peering through the crack I could see the nose and one eye of the old midwife.

"What do you want?" she said.

"This is John Gallantly," I answered. "I want you to come and attend my wife; she's in labour."

"Effie Gallows?" she said truculently.

"What does it matter to you," I said, "who it is? She's in labour; she needs your help!"

"Then she can go to someone else," she shouted. "I'll no take hand in bringing a bastard into the world."

She tried to slam the door, but I had slipped my foot in the crack.

"You can't do that," I said angrily. "You may cost her her life. You'd be to blame then if she were to die."

She seemed a bit taken aback by that thought and hesitated, but only for a second. Then she threw her head back. "There would be none around here that would blame me."

"Mistress Murry, for God's sake!" I cried, "how can you stand there and deny help to anyone that's in pain? What kind of a woman are you? Have you no kindness in you? Overlook whatever you have against my wife and come, please come." I was begging now.

She shook her head. "I have no right to interfere in her punishment. If there was anyone else could do it for you I would tell you her name, but there isna and besides there is no one in the whole of Durkie would turn a hand for Effie Gallows. Go back to her yourself; she'll need you, and if God wants her brat to live it will live and her too."

I withdrew my foot from the door, for I knew any further words to be a waste of time. The door was closed and I turned away, bitterness in my heart and despair in my mind. I had a sudden thought that maybe Minister could force her to come, so without thinking further I started to run for his house. As I ran I cried for Effie, sitting in her wooden chair racked by pain.

My battering on the door roused Minister at once. He leant out from his bedroom window. "Who are you?" he called down. I looked up and saw his sleep-ridden face. My worry must have shown in the light, for all he said was, "John," and he drew in as if he had been pulled from behind. In a half a second he was at the door. "Is it Effie?" he said.

"Aye," I answered, "her time has come. The mid-wife willna come with me to her. I thought you could make her."

"She wouldna come?" he said in a whisper. "She wouldna come?" Then he shook himself as if he had been dreaming. "Come in," he said sharply, "and I'll put on my things and we'll see what can be done."

I sat in the parlour waiting for him to come down. I was haunted by sight of Effie, the way her pain-heavy eyes had looked. I knew she would be wonder-ing what had come to me, why I wasn't already back. All this fiddling about was driving me crazy-wild. Why didn't Minister come? I sent myself into an agony of impatience, figuring him doing up his boots. It would take so long. I know how long it takes to tie up your boots when you're in a hurry, how the ends have to be forced through each eyehole; maybe the point is off one of Minister's laces—I know how long that takes. I jumped up violently and with three strides

I was at the foot of the stairs calling: "For God's sake, hurry!"

He came rattling downstairs, buttoning his coat as he came. I had the front door open waiting for him to pass through. We ran abreast down the street and again the time-taking, nerve-racking business of thudding on the door and straining for an answer. The midwife hadn't put out the light, so that meant that she was still downstairs and hadn't gone to bed again, and to my nervous mind that her conscience was at work. She came at last to the door and opened it with an air of dramatic dignity, but she winced when her eyes fell on Minister.

"Mrs. Murry," he began at once, "if you refuse your help to a woman in labour it is in my power to report you to the authorities in Edinburgh and to have your licence taken from you." The use of the word Edinburgh worked like magic, for that was an alien and powerful place to her, and I saw at once that her self-assurance was shaken.

"I promised that I wouldna go, and I am not one to break my word—" There was something disgusting in the flaunting of her honesty, trying to put the blame on someone else, the one she had promised.

"I will take the responsibility for your broken word if you come," said Minister. "But mind you, if you don't I'll go straight to Edinburgh in the morning."

The word worked altogether this time and she turned around saying: "I'll come with you," and walked down the hall and went into one of the back rooms. She came out again shortly, fully dressed. Her face was sour, but she had a professional air about her and a certain sulky pride in her importance in all this.

She stood in the hall and turned her face away from me. "Have you anything prepared?" she said.

"It's come too soon," I said. "We haven't anything prepared."

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently; she was going to rub her superiority in, I could see that. Well, I didn't care how rude she was as long as she was going to come. "Then I'll get my things," she said. Her tone of voice implied that she would rather not use her things in a case like this.

"Hurry up!" I said angrily, and she turned and looked at me as if I had called a filthy name after her.

The three of us set down the road together. Minister had said: "I can come, John, can I?" and I was all too glad to have him.

It was cold and drizzling and not a soul was stirring, and there was not a light to be seen in any of the cottages we passed.

The midwife was a hindrance to our hurry, for she kept lagging behind and making mock sighs and say-

ing: "I canna walk as fast as you. You go on ahead and I'll come in my own time."

But I was not going to let her leave our sight, so we slackened our pace and it was agony to me to have to walk her pace, which I knew to be much slower than she was capable of. I carried her fillet bag. It was very light. If it had only been heavy it would have seemed easier to walk as slowly as we had to. Suddenly I could stand it no longer; I had to hurry on. I felt incapable of crawling like this—it was making me feel sick; so with "You will come as soon as you can," to Minister, I broke into a run. I heard the midwife laugh and I cursed her.

It was fine to be keeping pace with one's nerves, fine to have the wind on my face, fine to be putting distance behind me, to have my actual speed keep time with my sense of hurry. I laughed out of sheer satisfaction; at last, at last I am on my way back to you, Effie! I am running back to you faster than I ever knew I could run. I have strong-muscled legs that force the ground behind me. I felt them as I ran, and I could feel the muscles hard as iron. I laughed again out of happy pride. The air fills my lungs, cold and fresh, and comes out again broad and even. I am like a fine machine, accurately strong, mathematically reckless, ploughing down the road, levelling down the landscape, banishing trees and landmarks as I run,

rolling up yard after yard of stone dike. And when I come to your gate I leave nothing behind me; I bring it all to you, every stick and stone, for I have conquered them and slashed them and destroyed them, all to get to you. I have conquered the length and the time that hung between us.

As I came in, Effie was standing hanging onto the dresser. She turned and looked at me and on her face for the first time since I had known her I saw written a look of self-pity. I went to her and put my arms around her and she hung onto me, just the way she had clung to the dresser.

She cried gently, pathetically; it tore at my heart to hear her. "I canna stand this, John," she was saying. "It's too awful; it's too unbearable, and it goes on and on, and there's no getting used to it. I say to myself that the world, after all, is full of children and that they were all born like this, with just as much pain, but that doesn't help. It seems unholy and wrong and that the whole thing is against nature, or surely it would be simpler and kinder." She let her head fall heavily on my shoulder and moved it from side to side, making all the time little cries; then she raised her head suddenly and looked at me with indignation, pettishly. "Where is the midwife?"

"She's coming up the road with Minister," I told her.

She crumpled with relief at once and gave herself up again to her pain. She moved herself free from my arms and, pushing me gently off with her listless hand, made her way slowly and dejectedly over to the window, where she leant her brow on the pane and stayed looking out. I stood beside her, wishing to God I could do something to help her and ease her pain; but I knew this to be hopeless, this was an inevitable pain and it had to be gone through with.

Effie was saying: "How strange it looks outside! I seem to have no connection with the outside world at all—there's a little bird hopping about, very gay and happy, the grass and the trees are teeming with little living things, all content, but I have nothing in common with any of them. It's the first time I have ever felt that. I'll never be the same again, John, after this. I know now that there's no connection between the creatures in the world, and no love lost. It's everyone for himself and his own little agony and pleasure."

She turned and clung to my arm. "Walk me to the chair," she said. "You see I can't stay any one place for long. I wish I had a treadmill to tread on; it seems the only thing that would give me comfort."

"Did you make yourself tea?" I asked. She shook her head. "Then I'll make it now," I said. It gave me a feeling of satisfaction to be doing something for her, even as small a thing as this. She drank it grate-

fully and I had a cup myself, for I was beginning to feel weak from hunger.

While we drank our tea, there seemed to be a sweet lull in Effie's pain, and I was able to take my mind off her for a few minutes and sit by her calmly, almost touching again our normal state. But not for long, though. A sudden cry and a tightening of her hands on the chair sent the moment's respite shuddering off into the air. At the same moment Minister and the midwife were knocking on the door.

The midwife stood like a general surveying the field of battle. She had no kind word or look for Effie, her interest was focused purely on the house. "Have you a fire lit in the bedroom?" she asked. "We'll need plenty of warm water. After the fire's lit we can go upstairs." And for the first time since she came in, she let her eyes slide over Effie. Minister had Effie's hand between his and his whole bearing was full of pity.

"You might make Mrs. Murry a cup of tea, John," said Effie. "I am sure you must want it," she said to her. But if the midwife heard she took no notice and Effie looked from me to the minister and back again to me, and mixed with the drawn look on her poor, tired face was a look of inquiry.

I made the midwife her tea, and she sat off in the corner drinking it with an air of insult. I filled the coal-

scuttle full of coal and built a fire in the bedroom. I straightened out the bed as best I could, then I came downstairs; and Effie was standing holding onto the back of a chair and the midwife had a mixture of different-sized bowls laid out on the table. Among them her hands lingered like dirty rags. She looked up as I came in, and started for the door. "Where is it?" she said, turning her eyes up to the top of the stairs.

"I'll show you," I answered, and I led her to the bedroom. She stood as she had stood in the room downstairs and looked the room over, and this time I was aware that it was only half professional contemplation; the other half was common woman's curiosity.

I helped her carry up her various things. She cleared the dressing table and placed them on it and together we moved it to the foot of the bed. Everything she did she did in silence and my help was given more or less by guessing what it was she was trying to do and not by her asking. It was all very wearing and exasperating to have this added trouble at such a time.

"You can get her now," she said.

We stood looking at each other; I felt I could have struck her. She turned abruptly and started to pull at the sheets on the bed and I, feeling weak all over, made my way downstairs, saying to myself as I went

that I must stay calm and that anything the midwife did or said I must overlook for Effie's sake.

I helped Effie into bed and she lay with her eyes closed. I pulled the sheet half-way over her. I whispered into her ear, saying: "It won't be long now, dear." She nodded, and the tears from her closed eyes crept slowly down her cheek. I held her hand to my cheek, crying a little myself. I looked on her as she lay there on her back, and my eyes rested on the deformity her beautiful body had suffered and a gush of joy rushed to my heart, for I knew that that was soon to pass away, and that she would look again as she used to look.

The midwife had seated herself in the corner, and with an air of impatient patience was knitting. Effie opened her eyes and looked at her; then she said to me quietly, turning her head again in the midwife's direction: "This woman hopes that I will die."

"Effie," I said back, "surely I am more to you than her, and if you die I will die."

"Of course," she said, "I wasn't forgetting that, but it seems strange to me that at a time like this she should show her feelings so plain." She looked at her again with her heavy eyes. "You don't think, do you, that we could do without her?"

"No, Effie; she's here to help you and she'll help you when the time comes, and after all what else in the world matters?"

"Yes, you're right, but just the same it's hard to understand."

The midwife was looking at us with a look in her eye that an eagle might have who had been interrupted in the middle of a killing. She had stopped her knitting, and since it was red and lay like a bleeding piece of flesh in her lap with her hands tense upon it, the resemblance was very clear to me. She got up and with her piece of flesh dangling from her hands she moved smoothly from the room. I had a sudden fear that perhaps she was gone for good, so I went after her and called down the stairs: "Where are you going, Mrs. Murry?"

"When your wife needs me I will come up again; till that time I'll sit down here."

I went and sat by Effie again, watching over her dumbly while she struggled with her pain—hour after hour it went on. Her face grew haggard, her poor tired arms seemed to get thinner, she moaned now all the time; her hands were weak from constant clenching and spanning.

"It seems beyond my strength now," she said. "I think it's coming. You'd better get her." Her moans had started to be long and fierce; almost desperate they sounded, and angry.

I ran downstairs and told the midwife. She folded up her knitting with a look of eagerness on her face

and scurried out of the room. I stood wondering what to do now. I looked around for Minister but he had gone. I ran up the stairs two at a time; the door was shut. I stood screwing my hands together. I heard Effie's cries. They were cries now; I couldn't stand it. I put my hands over my ears and ran down the stairs again. I was beside myself; I could neither sit down nor stand up. If I only had something to do; her screams were driving me mad. I opened the front door and forced myself to walk slowly through the garden. I came to the orchard and sat on the seat I had made for Effie and me, but all the time my heart was indoors and my ears were straining for a sound. Hearing her cries was bad enough, but not hearing them seemed worse.

I could stand the silence no longer, so I rushed back to the house and threw the door open and entered with a great sense of relief. I shut the door quietly and listened, and there was no sound at all; there was absolute, complete silence such as I had never imagined there could be. I stood straining in every muscle to see if I could hear anything at all. Fear gripped my heart; it sounded like death. You couldn't have such silence without death.

Suddenly the air was split in two by a cry. It was like the meaning of the pain of all the cries put into one and howled out from one throat. I was taken up by it

and thrown like a dried husk up and down a whirling void, buffeted about an empty world to the music of this scream of pain. Then it stopped as suddenly as it had come and I fell to earth and was like one stunned.

There was a knock on the front door and I found myself opening it. It was Minister, and he had with him the pleasant old lady who had been a witness at our wedding. She was smiling as kindly as she had done then.

Minister said: "She has come to do the housework for Effie until she's better."

I couldn't talk yet, and motioned them into the kitchen. "I think it's happened," I said finally. "It happened a minute ago, I think."

The nice old woman said happily: "That's fine; it's good it's over." I looked at her doubtfully, wondering to myself if she were quite sane. It seemed unusual to have a woman saying kindly things to you; but she was nodding her head brightly, and she put her hand on my arm and it was warm and round like a furry kitten. "Why don't you go up and see?" she said.

On the way up the stairs I heard the cry of Effie's child and I half turned to go down again, for I felt a twinge of hate go through me. It was swift as it was instinctive and its place was taken by a gush of relief that it was all over at last.

When I entered the room the midwife was leaning over Effie, pressing her body with her hands. "It's the afterbirth," she said. Then she turned her head and let her eyes rest on something on the foot of the bed that looked like a bundle of clothes. "There it is," she said.

Effie was moaning softly. Her eyes were shut and she did not bother to open them to look at me. She had great blue circles under them and her hair was matted with sweat.

"Get me some warm water and I'll wash it," the midwife said, again turning her eyes on the child.

"There's a woman downstairs that will do it," I said, and I lifted the child carefully up. The midwife was looking at me with curiosity written on her face, wondering, I suppose, who the woman downstairs might be. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and as I reached the door she called out: "Tell her to look out for its navel; it's not right bound."

I gave the child to the kindly old woman, who seemed to be made strangely happy by having it in her arms. I got a basin for her and warm water and soap and a cloth and put them on a chair by the fire. I turned my back on her while she washed it, for I had no desire yet to lay eyes on it.

"I think," said Minister, "we might do well by a glass of wine." We held the glasses high and we said

solemnly, "To Effie!" And as I put mine to my lips I heard the kind old woman sing out happily: "It's a boy!"

The child was now two weeks old, but it was weakly and every day saw it a little thinner. It could keep no food in its belly. Then the day came when it would breast no more and its piteous little cries grew fainter. Effie held it in her arms all day and all night, gazing into its face, wiping tenderly away the tears that sometimes fell on its bony little head from her wide, panic-stricken eyes.

Then one morning when the dawn still hung around the window panes and the newly lit fire crackled triumphantly in the grate, it closed its indefinite-coloured eyes and died. I made a little wooden box and Minister came and said a service and we buried it in the orchard under a tree where I had dug a hole.

Minister stood in the doorway with his hat in his hands, for he was going. I sat watching him, for something was on his mind. He cleared his throat and then, with an obvious effort, said miserably: "Effie, I may not be seeing you both for a while, that is, unless you might be coming to Edinburgh sometime."

Effie rose up and went toward him and pulled him by the hand back into the room. She looked at him

hopelessly, sadly. "You mean," she said, "that you are leaving Durkie?"

He nodded sadly. "That's it."

"You've been put out of the church?" she demanded.

"Not exactly," he answered.

"Aye, it's exactly that, just the way John was put out of the school, and all on account of me. Me!" she cried, and she beat her chest with her hands. "Good God, what kind of a filthy creature am I that I hurt everyone that comes near me? Even my own child wouldn't live with me; he refused my milk, what he drank he spat up." She covered her face with her hands and sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

"I thought," she said desperately, catching Minister by the arm and looking into his face wildly, apologetically, "I thought that I would have to suffer for all I had done, but I never thought that those that liked me would have to suffer too."

"Effie," said Minister, "my only suffering is that I won't see you for a while. I'd leave Durkie gladly if you and John were to be in Edinburgh. You know that I was never happy here but for you. Why won't you both come with me? You'd be much better off there."

Effie turned her tear-ridden face to me. "Would you care to go and live in Edinburgh, John?"

"Indeed I would," I called out, joy biting at my heart.

"Then, when do you go, Minister?" she said.

"In two weeks' time," he answered.

"Then we'll go with you."

Minister sat down out of sheer relief. If any one of us had been capable of happiness then we would have been happy. Of the three of us Minister and I were naturally the lightest of heart, but out of respect for Effie's sorrow we cared not to show it, but talked carefully and dryly of our plans, taking care to keep all excitement or pleasure out of our voices.

I noticed while we talked that Effie went over to the window and stayed there looking out. She had her hand over her mouth and I knew her to be looking through the bare trees of the orchard to the small patch of ravaged ground under which the dead child lay. She was saying: "We'll have to leave the poor wee dead thing behind us when we go, the poor lonely creature."

The three of us sat by the fire in silence, the moving light from the flickering lamp licked at our faces and did mad things with our expressions, lighting up an eye or a mouth which seen by itself, divorced from the other features, seemed mad and far-fetched and an entity on its own, all-powerful and unaffected.

Again Minister rose up to go and Effie said in a voice that was thick through crying: "Why don't you walk down the road with Minister, John? I won't mind being alone, and I think you might enjoy it."

I was happy to do so, for the Grey House was oppressive to me with sorrow and I was glad to escape from it for a while, and I felt too that in a way Effie would like to be by herself. We walked in silence, but I think that, like me, Minister felt that the gloom of the Grey House was still upon us; we were still in its shadow; it had a hand on each of our hearts, keeping us from relief. Then we came to a point in the length between it and the minister's house where we were bound, when the grasp of the Grey House weakened, and half regretfully, feeling unfaithful, we slid from its hold altogether and stood straighter and walked faster into spaces vacant and untroubled.

Talking was still hard, so we said very little and what words we did exchange touched in no way on the situation or Effie's grief, but were purely irrelevant and had to do with the weather and such. I would have liked to hear the details of Minister's leaving the church, how it happened and what his true feelings were on that account, but I was not one to force things and I knew well enough that Minister, being simple and honest, would hide nothing when the time was ripe for him to talk about it. So I contained myself and

said nothing that might draw him out of his kindly reticence.

We came to his gate and feeling that all this was soon to pass from my sight forever, we shook hands, saying good-night. He said: "I'll come to the Grey House in a couple of days and we can talk things over. That'll give Effie some time to herself without having to worry about plans, but if she—but if you both want me," he corrected himself gently, "I'll be here; but you know that."

I smiled to myself a bit bitterly, for I suddenly saw that Minister was bound to me more through Effie than on my own account, and I was weak and tired enough to feel sorry for myself and hurt. But I answered calmly enough: "Thank you, Minister. We're both grateful to you."

IX

I WALKED the road that afternoon that I had walked so often. I let my eyes rest warmly and somewhat sadly on each object that by my feeling for it had become as a landmark to me. There was the big old apple-tree with its heavy tortured-looking branches that bore no fruit, the long stretches of stumbling stone dike that led God knows where. I looked at them slyly, out of the corner of my eye, wondering who had built them and why—to guard their land? I suppose, out of insolence of ownership? to keep off those that didn't own land. Well, whatever it was, they were dead these many years and their fields remained and their stone dikes that marked them. The little patch of pine-trees, the dainty little forest and the

delicate silver stream that ran through it, all as if it had been ordered by some gay queen, perhaps for a little child that she had, to ride through on a little pony; it was too exquisite and fanciful to be natural, at least to these parts.

And then from this part on the road I could see what I liked best to see: the hills in the distance, some of them with great rocks showing through, partly lit by the sun when the sun was out, then when a cloud came between them and the sun they were plunged into black. It took your breath away, the violence of the change; then when the cloud passed, back they came, all their juts blazing with light and their hollows hung with shadow. You could see shadows, too, pass over them, shadows of moving clouds, colourless shadows that seemed to be neither in the air nor on the hillside, that had no depth nor heat, but passed like a wave in mid-ocean, that came from nowhere, going nowhere and will soon be picked up by the sea again, its exciting, short, meaningless life taken from it. And here is the high hawthorn hedge where the cattle stand sometimes on the side that's from the sun when the sun annoys them.

I can see the Grey House now, solemn and square, standing firmly as if hiding from the passer-by, the garden in the back and the orchard where Effie's little child lies, and I know that in one of its rooms, hidden

by its cold grey front, there is Effie. In the field, across from the house, among the sheep, a man is walking, going toward the stone dike to get out of the field. He is tall and well built. I keep my eye on him as he scrambles over the dike, throwing one leg over after another, scattering a few heavy stones as he jumps clear. They make a hollow clinking sound as they hit other stones on their way to the ground where they will lie, I suppose forever, as much lost to time or change as Effie's dead child.

The man, to my amazement, has his hand on the gate, and it swings open for him and he walks through and up the path. I stood still with shock, for I suddenly know him: it's Effie's man, Effie's lover, the father of her dead child, and he's walking up the path to her.

What shall I do? Shall I go after him, shall I keep him from going in? I couldn't now; he's at the door already, and I am quite a way from the gate.

I went over to the dike and sat down on it and closed my eyes and tried to put his image from my mind, but I could see him always walking up the path. I tried to tell myself that his coming would mean nothing to Effie, but I knew that to be wrong. He was the father of her child, he would feel grief the way she does that it died. She would be drawn to him by that fact, she couldn't help herself. I looked into my own

miserable heart and I discovered to my horror that I had been glad when the child had died; I was glad to have it die, for I was jealous of it; but he, he wouldn't feel like that, it was part of him and part of Effie, and a part of them both had died, and if they had any feeling left for each other at all, they would be bound together again. Even if they had no feeling left for each other, even then they would be drawn together, and my little bit of progress that I had made with Effie would be shaken by the roots. I hated him as only the loser can hate the winner. His was such a careless victory; so easy for him to jump the dike and go walking up the pathway. I had worked and struggled and put all the energy I had into making what life I had with Effie give meaning for her. I had been as careful and as sensitive as a man could be, building up day by day an emotional understanding with her whereby she might feel at ease and be content, as airy and difficult as any spider web for a man to build, to catch and hold her remotest feeling and her strongest wish. And here, suddenly, this man, like a careless god, comes crashing back into it all. I had the better of him once, but that was more through circumstances against him. This time, I felt, it was hopeless. He has too much on his side now; he couldn't have picked a wiser time to come back. It was the right moment, some power had made him come back today. This

sense of the emotional fitness of his return heightened my despair, for I felt that it was somehow right.

I sat on miserably, my heart knocking out slow heavy beats. What was I to do? Was I to break in on them? I looked up and down the road dumbly, thinking should I go this way and tell Minister? or should I walk up the path the way he had done? I seemed incapable of any decision in the matter, and so I sat on weakly, hugging my misery to my heart. At last I felt the cold and shivered and automatically started for the house. Half-way up the path I hesitated, inclined to turn back, but even while I did it I knew I was going in.

I hung my hat and coat on the lobby stand, and very much the way I used to enter the schoolroom I entered the kitchen. They were standing far apart, looking at each other. Effie had the same expression on her face that she had had when she first saw him at the fair. He turned swiftly around and glanced at me and just as quickly turned away again. The three of us stood so, silent and watchful, for what seemed a long time. Then Effie turned her back on us and walked over to the window. It was as if we had both been tied to her by invisible threads and when she turned she had cut us loose, for on her turning the tensity was broken and we sagged. I crossed the room and stirred the fire. The stranger sank wearily into a chair and clasped

his hands between his knees and closed his eyes and hung his head. Between his brows there was a line that looked as if it had been made with a knife.

I stayed crouched down by the fire, the poker in my hands, thinking to myself that I had misjudged Effie; she wasn't going to give way to her feelings, or at least it seemed to me that she hadn't so far. My self-confidence was coming back to me little by little. I looked round stealthily at the stranger, and the sight of him sitting with his hanging head and his soft-lipped, unhappy mouth arched down at the corners and the cleft of pain between his puckered brows set dancing a little elf in my brain, prompted half by joy and half by excitement. I heard the stranger say to me:

"You know whose child that is out there?"

I turned to look at him.

"You know that it's my child out there?"

I nodded. "Yes, I know," I said. I got up and crossed to a chair and sat down, watching him all the time.

"You knew all the time?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Effie told you?"

I nodded again. He jumped up fiercely, showing his anger, then slowly sat down again, controlling it.

"Did it never strike you," he said, "that since I was the child's father I ought to have been told, and that I was the one to look out for Effie?"

I thought to myself that it was rather late in the day for him to be feeling that now, and he understood what I was thinking, for when I said tersely: "Well, that's all over now, anyhow," he turned on me like a madman, saying:

"You think I did wrong to Effie? You think that it is all on my side? If Effie had been willing to marry me, do you think I'd have married anyone else? I left my wife, didn't I? I tell you, I haven't had a day's peace, and then when Ernest Weir died I thought surely she'd take me back; that's why I came, but before that I came to the fair after her, didn't I?"

Effie came swiftly over from the window, cutting in on his words, and leant over him and caught him by the shoulder and shook him fiercely and said: "What's that you said about Ernest Weir? What's that you said about his being dead?"

Then she fairly shouted: "What do you know about his being dead?"

He was swaying his head back and forth, biting his lips, his eyes tightly closed, Effie shook at him again. "Tell me if you know anything about Ernest Weir being dead," she demanded.

He suddenly loosened and looked up into her face, his own face all smoothed out. "You know as well as I do," he said, "about Ernest Weir."

She caught him by the thick hair and forced his

head back and looked with horror on his face. He looked up at her simply, hiding nothing, entirely at her mercy.

"You killed Ernest Weir!" she said slowly. "You killed Ernest Weir."

She let the hair slide from between her fingers, but she still held her hand stretched over his head, and she said again: "You killed Ernest Weir," then turned and left him and went over to the window again and stood looking out.

"Who did you think killed him, Effie?" he said.

"Fiddler," she answered without looking around.

"Fiddler?" he said. "It was my face Ernest kicked, Effie."

She came swooping back from the window, circling around him, touching him on the shoulder as she passed. "You'll give yourself up? You'll go now and give yourself up, this very day, you'll not wait, you'll give yourself up at once." Then she stamped her foot at his silence, saying: "You will, won't you?"

He was looking at her coldly; then he got up slowly, looking at her all the time, and caught her hands strongly in his and held them down by her sides.

"Are you telling me," he said bitterly, "that you want me to give myself up?" She winced, for he must have been hurting her hands, and lowered her eyes.

"Look at me!" he commanded. She raised her eyes

to his again. "Answer me this, for it's the last time I'll ever ask you: Do you love me as I love you?"

The dead look came over her face again and she said nothing; then, when he saw that she wouldn't answer, he brought her hands together and threw her violently away from him. She saved herself by a strong twist from falling, but he was on her again, holding her by the shoulders this time.

"Effie, for God's sake, Effie, be the way you used to be. Have you grown into a hard woman?"

"Leave me alone," she said. "Take your hands off me—take your hands away or I'll strike you."

He shook his head wilfully. "Not till you play fair with me, and tell me what I want to know!"

They stood there, angry and silent, trying to look each other down, rapt in their power of will.

It was all so hopeless. I saw in a flash that here were two people who by their very differences were bound together, and yet by the strength of their differences and what they meant to each of them it would be death for any one of them to give in to the other. They were both too powerful and too strong and their spiritual vanities were too far in control of them to allow any slackness of their convictions, either for love or pleasure. They were king and queen, but of totally different countries, and so the fight was inevitable and he who lost, lost his country.

I was sorry for Effie, standing with her white torn face and her pride that kept the tears from her eyes and held her standing like a tower of stone. I knew how her body ached. I knew the pain in her heavy, milk-laden breasts and how her heart cried out for peace.

I went over to them, and said to them both: "Effie is tired. Let her sit down." They took no heed, for I don't even think that they knew what I said. They were absorbed and entangled in each other's demands till they were no longer separate but stood like a single rock. I felt as futile of making any impression on them as the smallest of fish might feel in the mildest of waters surrounding a rock of equal strength.

I felt a sudden rage at them. "Look here!" I cried, and caught him by the arm. "Stop this, it's gone far enough! Effie is tired, I tell you, she is ill. You have no right to excite her like this—do you hear me? Let her go. It's all right for you, but Effie's ill."

He turned and looked at me carelessly, as if he questioned my power to interfere. Then I saw by the tightening of his eyes that memory of me and of Effie's grief was coming back to him, and he slid his hands from her shoulders reluctantly and heavily and turned hopelessly away and sat as he had before with his hands gripped and his eyes closed, in the nearest chair.

I put my arm round Effie. "You're going to lie

down for a bit upstairs." And I led her from the room and up the stairs. She seemed to have no will of her own left, so I covered her up and I said: "I'll go and get rid of him, then I'll come back."

I ran downstairs feeling strangely efficient, and went straight over to him and said: "You'd better go now; Effie's not well and I know she would rather not see you again. It ought to be plain to you that it will do you no good to stay."

"No, I've got to see Effie again. I won't go till I've seen her."

"You have got to go," I cried.

But he only repeated himself stubbornly, doggedly, "Not till I see her."

I stood and looked at him exasperated. I was anxious to have him go; I wanted to see the last of him. If I could only somehow set him on his way, walking down the path and over the stone dike and gone across the field forever; if only I could do this before Effie had a chance to see him again. I was still afraid that something might be said that would change her feelings toward him.

But he wasn't going. That was plain from the look on his face, so I gave up trying.

"Effie's asleep," I said.

He looked me coldly over. "That's not true," he answered.

I felt cheap, for I knew that my intention was cheap. I had wanted to give him the thought that Effie felt so little for him that she could go to sleep with him there in the house, and now that I had failed I felt it all the more. I stood first on one foot then on the other, not sure quite what to do. I was self-conscious, for he was watching me carefully, he was figuring out what manner of man I might be. I felt angry and misjudged, for he had never bothered to do this before. It needed my cheap remark to set him off thinking what he wanted to think—that I was a sad specimen and not up to much, by the way he turned his head away from me, dismissing me from his mind I could tell that he had made up his mind about me and had lost interest. I stood shaken with hate. My hands were damp. I made a move toward him and he looked up calmly.

"Don't do that; I could kill you easily," he said. It wasn't boasting; he was sure of himself. It was almost kindness.

I turned away, bitterness in my heart. There was nothing to do but sit down and wait, but God knows what for. I was still shaking inside. So I sat down, gradually feeling calmer, and slowly my reason, at once my friend and my enemy, asserted itself and I said to myself that it was only natural that he should think me of no account, that after all I didn't think so highly of him either, and that if he were more of the fighting

type and better fitted to fight than I, well, that was through no fault of mine and suited me well enough.

I felt the need of a drink badly, so since he was there it would have been inhuman not to ask him if he felt like one, too. I felt a slight disloyalty to myself and Effie as I did it, but I couldn't go and drink in the closet, and to sit and drink by myself with him sitting there would have been impossible for me. Anyhow, when I asked him, he nodded his head, and smiled gaily and shrewdly, for he knew my predicament and plainly got pleasure from it. His smile was beguiling, and for a moment I felt his charm, but I stamped, in my mind, my foot on his smiling face, forced it back into the strata where resentment lived, and felt a certain virtuous dignity in the act.

So we sat and drank together, unconsciously relaxing, and by the power of the spirits were beguiled into more lenient attitudes toward each other. But the silence was nevertheless tight and fierce. I knew he wanted to talk things over, but I wouldn't help him out any. He would turn his head first to the right, then to the left, then turn on me suddenly and open his mouth as if to say something. Suddenly his face would harden and he would shut his mouth so fiercely that you could hear his teeth meet, his heavy lips lay one on the other, forming in the sullenness what in a weaker man would have been called a pout.

That's what there was about this man; if any other had looked and done the things that he did it would have been easy to place them and condemn them, but with him there was always a saving moment, a slight shiver, almost, of expression, that always saved him from actuality and sent him soaring three thousand miles from your reach. It was his great charm, this something you couldn't touch or name, that kept you always curious and never satisfied. There was only one way to deal with him; I realized that now. It was to keep him out altogether, for once you let him in, he would rule you. I understood Effie's caution now, and what had seemed to me an over-emphasis of her coldness. She was right, he was like a strong and beautiful weed. If you let him in he would ruin all order and symmetry. It is true he would give you a glorious shamble of emotion in return, but for this you would have to pay with the peace of your mind, and your personal integrity would be lost to you forever. Effie had said once that the things he could do he had no respect for, and by the same token, the things he couldn't do were all he cared for. And it was true, he was a restless god without a kingdom.

Suddenly his patience was spent. He fixed me with his eyes, opened his mouth, and out came the words, thrown in my face: "How long have you and Effie been wed?"

"Three months," I answered, proudly.

"She was well on her way then," he said half to himself. Then he suddenly leapt to his feet and started to walk the room, taking great heavy strides, pushing aside with his leg anything that came in his way.

"Will she come down soon?" he asked.

"She'll come when she wants," I answered.

He stopped in front of me and slightly bowed, almost ceremoniously, saying: "Would you be so kind as to go and ask her to come?"

I stretched out my legs in front of me with an assumed air of ease and shook my head. "That I won't," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "All right, it's upstairs, isn't it?" and with that he was half-way up. He was about to open Effie's door when I came to the top of the stairs. I went forward and pulled his hand off the door knob. He tried to shake me off, but I held like death. I could see the anger mounting in his face.

"You can't go in there," I said unevenly, for our arms were around each other, bending this way and that, our feet shuffling almost in a dance. I had one of his arms bent back. If I could get it farther I could break it, and that's what I wanted. We were both concentrated on that arm and in our efforts, he to save it and me to break it, we almost forgot what we were fighting about. The door was thrown violently open

and there stood Effie looking at us, disgust written on her face.

"Stop it!" she demanded, and stamped her foot. "If it wasn't so stupid it might be funny." Then she turned and walked into the room again, calling over her shoulder as she did so: "Come in, both of you and we'll talk this thing out."

We slackened on each other, a little ashamed, and, straightening our clothes, followed her in.

"Sit there! and there!" she said, tilting her chin in the direction of two chairs. Then she came over to me and looked me earnestly in the face. "I am not against you, John; I understand how you feel, but we've all been overacting a bit, and it's time we came down to earth." Then she wheeled around and faced the stranger, pointing her finger at him like an arrow. "You must go away and never come back. We never want to see you again." She said this slowly and deliberately. "John and I are happy together. We are going to live together until we die. We have nothing in common with you. Your child is dead and you are dead. We have"—she winced as she said it—"no interest in the dead."

"What about you, Effie?" he said. "You say 'we' all the time. What about you?"

"I speak for myself," she answered, "because John and I think alike on this and everything else."

He looked at me for a moment, then he tore at his collar as if he were lacking air. "No," he called out, "it isn't right; I won't believe it. You loved me once and you must love me still. It isn't in your nature not to."

"Love can die like anything else," she said, "and my love for you is dead."

There was a silence; he was lost pondering what she had said; then he rubbed his face all over with the inner sides of his hands. "I'd best give myself up," he said.

Effie leapt on it. "Aye," she said, "it's the only thing for you to do; it's the only way you can make up. You can't escape; you have no right to do wrong if you won't face it afterwards."

He covered his face again with his hands; again the tearing at his collar. Then he shook his head and his hair loosened and fell on his brow. "No, by God! I won't! I killed him, and I am glad of it. I would do it again."

Effie's voice cut in cold and clear on him. "I could tell on you." She pulled herself straight as if defending what she had said.

He rushed at her and caught her roughly in his arms. "Effie," he said, "Effie, if you did that I would believe you then; I would believe you hated me. If you did that"—he pushed her head gently back—"I wouldn't mind hanging, I wouldn't mind hanging."

She had her eyes closed and I knew she wouldn't dare look at him; this was her trial, which way she took now was definite. We all knew it, and I waited, scarcely able to breathe. It was as if I were two people and one of them cried out: "Effie, you love him—tell him that," for their qualities were matched and they were holy and beautiful together. Then there was me that ate and drank and was clothed, and I called out, a little stronger than the other: "Effie, I love you—stay by me!" And perhaps because my need was greater and she knew it, or perhaps it was that this man whom she loved had hurt her too much, she shook her head with her eyes still shut and moaned out: "Then go away and stay away, or I'll do it, sure."

He turned away without a word, and we waited, Effie and I, and heard the front door slam and the sound of his first few footsteps down the path; then we strained and caught the faint, far-off clink of the iron gate; then I counted and I knew him to be covering the dike and away across the fields, and so out of our ken forever.

There is always after a time of tensity a space of quietness and calm when one floats exhausted but at peace, no matter in what tragic circumstances the storm may have left you. You begin to live again

in the superficial things; you have gained the surface and are thankful to be there. Only happy people can afford the luxury of being unhappy; only those with little spirit can indulge in the things of the spirit; only those with little blood can live and drink the blood of others. This I know from experience. If I hurt anyone I hurt myself a thousand times more, and I almost envy the stranger the sense of hurt and self-pity he must be feeling compared to the shame of my conscience that argues me out of any victory based on the defeat of another. But I am going ahead of myself. I haven't reached this stage of remorse yet; my mind is asleep and exhausted, but I know where I was when I sank asleep, and I know that I shall be in the same place when I awake.

When Effie says wanly: "The world is a beautiful place, John," I know she is feeling what I feel, only more so, for she speaks of it as a stranger, with the round-eyed wonder of a sight-seer, and in her sudden love for the world lies the pathetic knowledge that she doesn't live in it enough, nor can she ever.

The gloaming came down suddenly, a thick and heavy black. It was as if the light had been dragged from the room, as if the light had gone and would never come back, and we groped silently and painfully

among its heavy thickness, fearful to light the lamps, fearful to see each other's naked face. We ate in the dark, lit only by a simmering fire. The bread crumpled dryly like hard stones in my mouth and I couldn't swallow. Only once I saw the pale flicker of Effie's hand lifting to her mouth, and once down again.

It became impossible to bear, and like a rush of water that floods the dam I was on my knees, my head on Effie's lap, crying the loud, shameless cries that only a man can cry.

She laid her hands on my head saying: "My dear, my dear! Don't take on so; nothing is worth it."

I felt like a child. I had that terrible, simple-minded sense of loneliness; for the first time in my life I felt I wanted my mother; I wanted to cry on my mother's lap, and I used Effie as if she were my mother, pressing my face close to her lap and clutching at her gown with my hands, and she was kind and understood and let her hands slide soothingly over my head, and I felt the comfort of it and grew firm and strong in my mind again. Then I heard her say: "It's getting late, John," in a voice that was faintly satisfied, seeing that she had accomplished her use and I was calm again.

I lit the lamp to take us up. On the bend of the stairs Effie turned her head and looked down and gave a little laugh that ended suddenly.

"Going upstairs or going down, what does it matter?" she said.

My breath was taken away by the bitterness of her voice and, being still a shade under the power of my childish breakdown, having not quite cast it off, I felt through the misery her remark made clear, a thrust for myself of drunken self-pity.

X

MINISTER stood in the doorway, shaking with agitation.

"They've got Fiddler," he said, "they're dragging him up the hill; they have his hands tied behind him."

Effie was sucking him in with her eyes, lost in horror. Then she shook herself like one waking up, and clean as silver she was past us and out the door and swiftly down the path.

We followed her without a word to each other. I caught up to her, but to blunt the keenness of the determination that was written on her face with words would have been ugly and almost sacrilege, so I dropped back to Minister, and we followed her at a distance, and it was like following after a beautiful

fine black horse that had caught the tail of the wind in its teeth and ran to outdo its wanton heart. We could see at last the black knot of people that hung around Fiddler, and our swiftness cut like a knife into their heavy motion forward.

Effie pushed through them and put them aside as if they were dried sticks; then, having got to their head, she turned and faced them, her feet wide apart and her arms stretched out like a barrier between them and the rest of the road. Her hair through the wind was like a heavy cloud on her brow and her eyes were narrowed and cold with glitter, her mouth was like a bitter grain and her breasts stood out like angry shields.

"Where are you taking Fiddler?" she called out as if it were something said from habit.

"We're taking him to the jail," a chorus answered.

"And why?" she cried, more threatening than before.

"He murdered Ernest Weir!" And then one voice trailed out: "Your husband—that was."

She dropped her arms slowly to her sides. She went to each man coldly, intimately, saying: "You're making a great mistake, a mistake, you understand; you've got hold of the wrong man."

They stood like figures of iron; righteousness had hung their mouths loose, and pleasure in their capture

had turned their eyes into granite balls. "What proof have you that we're mistaken?"

"I know who killed Ernest Weir," said Effie.

"And who was it?" they sneered.

"Let Fiddler go; then I'll tell you."

They formed their mouths into various distortions and spat forth their various tuneless sounds that are called laughter, turning their heavy flat faces around to each other in the doing, showing their grey teeth and their slothful heavy-pored tongues.

It was horrible. I hung my head and bit my lip and wanted to cry out. Of a sudden Effie's voice curled like a whip around them, by its sound driving the laughter from their faces.

"Fools!" she screamed at them. "Fools! Does nothing mean anything to you? Do you see nothing with your eyes? Do you not know a good woman when you see one? Can you not trust me, since I know I am to be trusted? Look at me truly: are my words true or not? What am I to you all that you won't take my word?"

Again there was the ugly confusion of laughter, and out of the movement of silly heads and dripping mouths came the words in answer: "Whore! Trollop! Bitch!"

I could see Fiddler tear at his bindings. His eyes were closed and tears were streaming down his face. They slipped to his mouth where he licked them in, since he had no hands to wipe them off.

Effie grew calm and distant as a willow-tree. "What proof do you want?" she said carefully.

There was a silence; then a voice clear with insolence and assuming tones of authority: "You'll have to come to the pen with him and us."

She turned on her heel and called over her shoulder, "All right then, come on!"

There was the shuffle of feet and the forcing of Fiddler, who stood his ground at first and wouldn't move. I went forward to Effie, to try and talk her out of it, but again the singleness of her expression put me to shame. We trudged on in silence that was only broken sometimes by groans of rage from Fiddler when he tried to shake off the men that held him, and once when he called out: "Oh, Effie! Effie Gallows!" But she took no heed; I doubt if she even heard. She flew ahead like a lonely sea-gull that flies back to the sea when the flower of the storm is scattered.

We came to the Provost's house and stood like waiting sheep while Effie beat on the door. There were many of us now; they had been gathered like fish in a net. Faces had appeared at windows as we passed and had been torn away, and the whole body in less than half a minute came running after us, and they asked what they knew already, and were told, and

became one of us. Little children skipped and hopped around us, looking by flashes eagerly into Effie's face, then Fiddler's, joy and excitement written on their own. And now we had come to our destination and all the breaths came heavy, like animals. It was almost too much excitement and pleasure for them to bear. It was indecent to watch. They seemed to have lost all sense of personal dignity; one felt that every organ and intestine in their coarse bodies was wide open and given up to the one emotion that was in control; whether it was a passion of excitement or brutal joy or exalted self-righteousness, their whole bodies inside and out were given up to it, and the breath that blew through their relaxed softness and mingled at their mouths' level was dull and of a bad sultry odour. An old woman whose age had weakened her control let dribble her urine on the road's dryness, where it formed a blotch that slid out unbroken from under the hem of her skirt. She looked at it anxiously, not sure whether to be proud or vexed, but sure in her mind of no criticism from the rest, since the emotion of the moment excused her and in a way she was doing what they did, only in her own fashion.

The door was opened by the Provost and without any words or explanation the crowd pushed through.

He tried to say something in protection of his dignity, but no heed was paid him. The sea of people poured over him and carried him along with them. He stood caught, pinned against the door that led to his parlour. The tail end of the crowd was still forcing itself in the front door and we were being packed tighter and tighter. It was hard to breathe, and red swollen faces were demanding that the Provost open the door. He was a small man and nervous, and his movements were jerky and frantic. He managed to open the door at last and was practically thrown in; he jinked around the table and caught on to a chair, putting it between him and us by way of protection. Our numbers were upon the room, obliterating the furniture, engulfing the Provost till he could hardly be seen: it was like a plague of flies.

I looked for Effie and she was standing pinned in a corner; her head was to one side and her eyes were closed. Fiddler towered above them all, his tousled head and his angry eyes. The Provost stamped his foot and Fiddler bellowed out: "Stop your blethering, everybody; the Provost wants to talk."

The Provost cleared his throat, he raised his thin voice as high as it would go. "Nothing can be done with all of you here; most of you will have to go." There was a roar of indignation and again the Provost stamped his foot and again Fiddler bellowed out:

"Shut up, you blethering whelps. We can all stand here till Doomsday and nothing will happen. What do you want in here, anyway? I am not going to be hung in here, you fools."

Again the voices started and men wriggled and stretched out their hands trying to get at Fiddler, for they were angry at being called fools, but the men who had caught him and stood around him, forced them off, for this was their prize, and they wanted the money for him, and they were as anxious to clear the room of all but the principals as the Provost was.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," screamed the Provost. "We'll all meet tomorrow morning and have this out in public. But till then, let all of you who are not concerned with the capture go away and come back tomorrow. Nothing," he screamed, "will be decided upon till tomorrow. You won't miss a thing."

There was a short spell of quiet, and you could almost hear them thinking it over; then a loud-mouthed man called out: "Will it be here?"

"No," screamed back the Provost. "We'll all meet in the schoolhouse at eight o'clock."

"All right," he called out. And then the rest of them followed as they had come in, like sheep. At last the room was emptied except for Effie and the Provost, Fiddler and the three men and myself.

The Provost was blowing his nose. He is a petty

frail little man, and he was almost gay in his self-approval over the way he considered he had managed things. He frisked around the room arranging the chairs in a semicircle. "We might as well sit down and take it easy," he said, and he smiled at us roguishly. Then he sat himself down and crossed one leg over the other and pulled his waistcoat down with irritating completeness.

I sat by Effie and put my arm over the back of her chair. "Effie," I asked, "are you all right?"

She nodded her head and smiled faintly. "Aye, I am all right."

"We want our reward," one of the men said slowly.

"You shall have it," said the Provost. He sounded like a woman talking to a child. "You shall have it, don't worry about that; but not till after tomorrow." He pulled at his waistcoat again and recrossed his legs.

Effie looked them over coldly. "And why do you expect a reward? For capturing the wrong man, I suppose."

"That's not so," one man answered in a rage. "There's a reward out for Fiddler, and we've got him and we want our money; and what's more, we're going to get it."

The Provost was in a stew; he looked from one to the other, he blew his nose, he bobbed up and down in his chair, he pulled at his waistcoat. "What's all

this about?" he demanded. "Is there any doubt that Fiddler killed Ernest Weir?"

"I happen to know he didn't," said Effie. "I happen to know who did."

"Then who was it?" he squeaked. "Who was it?" He jerked his narrow head up and down as a bird does when it pulls a worm from the ground.

"But she has no proof," bellowed one of the men, "only her word; and that's not well thought of around here. You've got to have more than her word."

"I have a witness," said Effie. "Also," she continued slowly, "the man who killed Ernest will not deny it when you ask him."

Fiddler's eyes were on Effie. "You know," he said, "who killed Ernest, Effie?"

"Aye," she said, "I know."

"And you're going to give him up?"

"I wouldn't have said anything if they hadn't got you, Fiddler."

His face was twisted with pain and he fought to keep the tears back, but they forced themselves out as if they had been made of steel, and slid easily down his cheeks.

"It puts me in a predicament," he said grimly. "God knows I don't want to hang!" And he twisted his head in torment. "But I have no taste to live if it means his hanging."

"It's out of your hands to do anything, Fiddler," said Effie. "I'd have to tell on him no matter who they had caught."

"Why?" said Fiddler.

Effie shrugged her shoulders sadly. "I don't know; I can't say. I say to myself that it's right because it's right; but that isn't the feeling I have. I wouldn't tell on him if they hadn't caught you or some other. It would be terrible to let someone pay for a thing they hadn't done, and yet, believe me, Fiddler, I'd much rather be dead than be in the position I am in now. But I can't help myself. I've got to do this, no matter what my feelings are."

There was a silence. They had been impressed by her sincerity at last, and the three men were crestfallen. Then one of them looked up suddenly, the victim of an idea. He sat on the edge of his chair, his eyes, which were close together, were almost meeting in his eagerness. "I think," he said, "that we could arrange it this way. She"—and he jerked his thumb at Effie—"can tell us who the right man is, and we three'll go and get him, and"—he nodded his head righteously—"get the reward for him. It would be only fair!" He shouted the last, for the Provost had shaken his head violently in disagreement.

He, on his part, had become excited by an idea. His thin cheeks were sucked in and let out again in an

effort to control the water that threatened to seep between his teeth, which were few. Being a man of little education and no imagination, any technical fact when he mouthed it, filled him with excited awe, and he spoke as if it were the word of God and hung with glory.

"Whoever it is that captures the murderer of Ernest Weir will get the reward. But"—he held his first finger up, quivering with straightness—"but everyone should be told who it is and all should have a fair chance at it. If you three alone were to be told you might be doing someone else out of his right: since a mistake has been made, if it has been made, you three will have to lose by it, the same as any other."

He threw one short leg over the other and swung it triumphantly. The three men were whispering together.

Effie leaned forward in her chair and said, coaxingly:

"Let Fiddler have his hands loose, Provost. He must be dead tired having them like that."

You could see Provost's mind swinging like a pendulum between decision and indecision. He would have enjoyed the gesture of releasing Fiddler, the sense of benevolence it would give him; on the other hand it was something to be sitting there swinging his little legs about while Fiddler sat like an impotent giant with his hands tied behind him. He felt safer and

more important with Fiddler's hands tied behind his back. So he hummed and hawed and bobbed up and down on his chair and sucked at his teeth, unable to make up his mind.

I looked at Fiddler and his eyes were on the Provost, and by his look I knew how he hated the man and how deeply it irked him to be in his control and under his favour. The three men were nodding to each other; they had come to some decision.

"Let him have his hands free," said Effie again. "He won't try to get away, will you Fiddler?"

He shook his head. "I give you my word on that," he said.

The Provost leaned toward Effie. "Tell me who is the real murderer and we'll take the rope off." Then he remembered the three men who were sitting on edge waiting to hear, and bringing a piece of paper out of his inner pocket and flourishing it in the air, he said: "You can write it down and I'll look at it. Then I'll burn it." And he looked pointedly at the three men who had grown sullen. "And no one else will see it."

Effie shook her head slowly. "No," she said, "I won't tell—not till tomorrow."

Provost squirmed in his chair. "You won't tell!" he screeched. "You won't tell! But let me tell you, you have to tell. If I want to know, you'll have to tell me."

She shook her head again. "No," she said,"I won't tell—not till tomorrow."

I saw Fiddler smile very slowly to himself. I saw him turn his big head and I saw him and Effie look into each other's eyes; it was a look of understanding that passed between them.

I was the only one who saw it, for the three men were submerged in their whispering again and Provost was lost in his various little indignant movements and befuddled by his contemplation of what to do and say now.

"Then let me tell you," began Provost again, "if you won't tell till tomorrow, you'll have to stay here till then; you can't go home." It was plainly a measure of revenge, and it gave him satisfaction. He had got out of his predicament.

"It makes no difference to me where I stay," said Effie, indifferently.

"Do you mean here in the house," I asked, "or—"

"No, I mean in the jail," he answered pettishly.

"But, man," I cried, "she's not a prisoner; you have no right to do that."

"Until she tells, I have every right; she is a prisoner."

"And will Fiddler go to jail, too?" sang out Effie.

"Of course he will," said the Provost, "and if your man can't be found, he'll be taken to Edinburgh to-

morrow to a proper jail; in fact he'll have to stay until this whole thing is straightened out. And now"—and he jumped to his feet—"now you can all go, all but you and you"—pointing first at Effie and then Fiddler.

But we all sat still.

One of the three men said: "We want to get this clear afore we go."

"Yes, what is it," said the Provost.

"It said nothing," continued the man heavily, "on the notice that was posted on the tree, about Fiddler being guilty or not; it said he was wanted and there was a reward for him. It didn't say if he done it you'd get a reward; and we got him, and we want the reward."

"That can all be decided tomorrow," said the Provost, and he blew his nose loudly to give his words the sense of finality.

"No," answered the man, "we want the money now; we won't go home till we get it." They were getting nasty and the Provost looked worried.

Effie said to them: "It's three pounds, isn't it?" She had a hard time keeping the sting out of her voice, for I knew the contempt she was feeling for them.

"Aye, three pounds," one of them answered, and when he said it he licked his lips; the very word "pound" seemed to excite him.

"Well," said Effie, "I can get the money and you

can have it, and if there is any loss it will be mine." The three heads were turned toward her eagerly—the sun might have been shining on their faces, they looked so bright. "John"—she turned to me—"you will go and get it for them, won't you? You know where it is."

"Of course," I answered.

The Provost was happy again, he almost tinkled with relief.

I got up to go.

"Would you bring me my cape?" said Effie. "It will be cold in there. And maybe, John, a coat for Fiddler—my father's, John." Then she gave a little laugh and looked me straight in the eyes. "See that there's nothing in the pockets." Then she turned casually and spoke to the others. "My father was forever leaving things in his pockets." They nodded, not interested and trying to show plainly that they had no desire to be on ordinary friendly terms with her.

There were still some people gathered around the house, talking and waiting; they stopped talking to watch me as I came out and were silent while I walked through them; then of a sudden behind my back I could hear the clatter of their tongues again and an occasional laugh was flung after me.

I half walked and half ran down the road by spurts, turning over in my mind as I moved the things that puzzled me. I was more concerned with these things at the time than with the fact of Effie being for the meanwhile a prisoner. I kept visualizing again and again in my mind the look that had passed between Effie and Fiddler; it kept passing before my eyes silently and fleetingly like the smile one ghost might give another. There had been a certain penetrating challenge and then a settled look of silent agreement. The shadow of that look still hung around her face when she turned to me and asked me to get the money and the coats. Then, when she had suggested that I search the pockets, her tone and expression were at the same time beseeching and insinuating. You may think me dull for not being able to come to any conclusion, but I was stunned and exhausted with excitement and I had reached the stage when one is incapable of doing anything but idiotically repeat a thought or an impression over and over.

And so I walked fast like a child bent on doing what it had been told to do, and my eyes lighted on the way on many objects familiar and unfamiliar. But I was like a man so steeped in misery that when he sees the happy faces of laughing people it conveys nothing to him of their happiness. Not even the pain of contrast is felt, nothing but seeing a thing as it is physically

and literally; and through the trembling impressions and weak liquid pillars of my thoughts, flitted, like two sickly butterflies, Effie's and Fiddler's faces and the look I had seen but couldn't name.

I reached at last the grey, empty house, with its orchard and the dead child in the orchard, and the wooden seat about ten paces from the place it lay, that I had built for Effie and me and the child. And I stood short for a moment and looked at the Grey House with its black windows and its even, impersonal proportions, and a lump came to my throat and I cried out loud in hatred of its coldness and aloofness. It seemed to me at this moment that this heavy house, surrounded by its doleful long moving grass and its black bitter twisted trees, was to blame for all our troubles. I opened the door and went in and looked around with distaste. The fire had died in the grate and the ashes had sifted between the bars and lay miserably and fruitlessly disfiguring the hearth. The chairs were in the positions, naturally, that they had been shocked into when we left the room. They looked grotesque and tortured, like aching teeth.

I turned and mounted the stairs and went into what had been Effie's father's room when he was alive. Unlike the other, it was in great order, almost painful order; one felt that the last ones who had tidied it up after they had dusted the last object and pulled the

blinds carefully to the half, had then, without even looking around, walked off on tiptoe, never to come back again.

I opened the door of the cupboard and searched among the dark hanging clothes for his greatcoat. Half-way down the stairs again I thought to look in the pockets. They were empty. I thought of the look Effie had given me when she had asked me to do this, and then it suddenly struck me what she had meant; she had wanted something to be in the pockets! She wanted me to put something in there, of course, but what? It struck me suddenly. I understood now the look that had passed between her and Fiddler. Of course I was to put something in the pocket of Fiddler's coat that would help him get out of jail and so escape. I laughed out loud with relief and almost hugged myself with pleasure. I went to the tool chest and lifted out thoughtfully one tool after another, making up my mind whether it could be of use or not. There was nothing, it seemed to me, that could be used but a small fret-saw, and even that seemed to me doubtful. Then I luckily thought of Effie's father's seaman's chest, and I ran upstairs and pulled it out from under his bed. There were many papers and letters with foreign stamps at their corners and yellow charts and unfamiliar coins from strange countries and a ball of marline pierced with a marline-spike.

I took one of these with the fanciful thought that one might be able to pick a lock with it. A small box held plumes, quills, and a seal, and to my great delight a diamond to cut glass with; this I took also. I went deeper into the chest; there were different flags folded one on top of the other. I reached bottom and felt around. My hand touched something that I knew to be a pistol. I held it in my hand considering it carefully. It seemed to me to be too dangerous to run the risk of having Fiddler found with it on him, and yet, since he was to escape, what could be of more use to him or give him more self-confidence?

I put these things, the fret-saw, the marline-spike, the diamond and the pistol, around the hem of the coat, between the lining and the cloth. I got a needle and thread and sewed closed the rent I had made. I went down the stairs, reaching for Effie's cloak on my way to the door. It wasn't until I was half-way down the path that to my horror I realized that I had forgotten all about the money for the men. I went thankfully in again and got it, taking more than was needed, for safety, and so I started off on my way back, feeling almost light-hearted, and made buoyant with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

I walked back at a strong pace and yet reluctant to find myself in sight of the Provost's door and having

to push in and out between the folks that hung around it. Effie wanted Fiddler to get away! Effie wanted Fiddler to get away! I thought this over definitely to myself. She was quite right, but still the law is the law! I couldn't help but think of that also. And then came a thought, sneaking its way through the barrier of my mind, that the active contemplation of Fiddler's escape had formed, leading in its wake all the twisted warriors of mistrust and envy; they came slyly, climbing over the palings that protected my reason and plunged their daggers fretfully into my defenceless mind, forcing me to writhe inwardly and squander my peace under the tortures of jealousy. For I knew now why Effie wanted Fiddler to get away. She wouldn't have to give the stranger's name. "Oh, Effie, you weakened. Why did you weaken? You've gone back on your word." And yet I knew that it wasn't actually so; she had no need for revenge, but I had wanted it; I wanted it fiercely. I wanted him dead and out of the way. Let him hang on a gallows; let the rooks pick out his dreamy eyes! It's what I wanted; I wanted him out of the world, away from me and Effie forever.

I had hung back, instinctively, slowing up. I felt the coat I carried, suddenly heavy on my arm. The impulse to sit down for a moment on the stone dike and think things over, came over me. I dragged through the dead grass to reach it; the delicate, star-shaped,

half-formed ice that hung on the grass tips crackled and gave under my weight.

I sat only a short time, and more in stubbornness, for I was aware that at the Provost's they were waiting for me, and I had too strong a conscience to bear it, so on a certain moment, which somehow or other I had set in my mind as the time when it would be possible to move, I leapt to my feet and hurried even faster than I had, down the road, admitting bitterly to myself that I was doing my best to make up for the time lost. And I thought to myself that I had no claim at all on life for myself and no power of decision in anything. I thought of the time when I was free, before I had married Effie, when I was my own master and taught in the school and did as I pleased. But even as I thought, I sickened at myself, for I love Effie and Effie is held at the Provost's, and God knows if she refuses to give the stranger's name what will happen to her. So, as you knock a limpet from a rock, I knocked myself off my mind and sent myself rattling and bumping off again among the things that exist but not sufficiently to be given the dignity of complaint and among which I must have my being.

But even from the darkness I still felt my ache, and around the surface of the bottomless pit that held my insignificance my thoughts whirled like troubled, dirt-hungry flies, attracted by the very inferiority of my hurt.

But such thoughts are mere transgressions from my temperamental birthright. So, run, little man, run fast along the hard white stiffly-winding highway, for God in his humour has given you nimble proportions —chunkity-chunk, like a smooth-muscled mule. Aye, just like that, one of the same kind, for what has a mule to do with the world but to run, fast or slow, slowly like a rolling barrel, or fast like a running bag of short sticks—clickity, clickity, over the earth's surfaces, carrying maybe, on his round, obliging back, what? Wine for his master? And I, on my arm, a heavy greatcoat.

I had gone through the crowd at last and opened the door of the room in which they sat. It was like pricking a bubble; they all slumped with relief when they saw me, for they had been sitting in silence waiting. Now Effie's eyes were on me, with a question in them. I smiled back to her, but I felt that my smile was cold, as it must have been, for she kept her eyes on me. But now they were concerned with me. She saw I was troubled; she was finding out just why I was troubled. I had a moment of fretfulness at which her eyes widened. I felt I wanted to be left alone and she felt it, for she took her eyes from me and fixed them on the floor, but her mind still dwelt on me and her eyes still held me.

The Provost had felt impatience; he was going through a regular routine of gestures to make this plain to me. "Well, my man, have you got the money?"

I nodded and reached in my pocket, pulling out my purse with difficulty. It had never been so full as this. The three men who had caught Fiddler leant forward in a group; in their eagerness and greed they looked dramatic and posed. They were given their money. They took it like heroes being given the Victoria Cross. It was given to them by the Provost in much the same manner. Disjointedly they left the room, nodding their big heads to Provost, with, "Thank you, sir," but never a word to Effie or me or a look at the man they had brought with them.

We were left, the three of us, sitting vacantly as if we had been marooned on a deserted island. Fiddler looked round at the closed door through which they had gone. He looked for some time, then he turned his head, smiling brightly. He nodded as if he were slowly agreeing with what he thought, then he put his dirty hand on Effie's knee and with the thumb of the other he pointed in the direction of the door. "Dirty lice," he said. "That's what they are, dirty lice!"

Effie laughed faintly. "They're all right in their way," she said. "It means a lot to them, I suppose, the money."

The Provost was angry. "One of these gentlemen," he said dryly, "is a farmer in Killbarken." He said Killbarken as if he might be saying Paradise. "The other two are, I am sure, equally respectable." He was filled with pride at his speech.

I looked at Fiddler with fear, hoping that he would keep himself in for all our sakes. His face was furrowed with angry lines; his eyes were blazing, every hair of his head seemed to shake with anger. On the ground at his feet lay like a dead snake the rope that had bound his hands, but the hands that once would have been so happy and fierce and quick to movement now lay in his lap, aching with shame, trembling with frustration. Poor Fiddler! The law had got him. He had to think twice now before he knocked a man down or gave some fat old fishwife a wallop on the hurdy. All his life he had gone about the world like a reckless prince; everything in the world that he had wanted was his for the taking, through the strength of his mind and the meaty power of his healthy big body. He had gone about sneering and commanding and ordering people about. And look at him now! how quickly he crumbled; what a silly futile lump of arrogance he has become, all his power gone to waste, all his equipment that had been trained all these years to make it possible for him to do as he wanted.

And now? Nothing happens, because a fool of a

little man, that he could crush in his right hand, has by some chance trick put himself in the pay of Her Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria, and is at this moment peering at Fiddler like a nervous weasel from underneath her skirts. If Fiddler as much as spits on him, he'll cry for his nice fat queenly mother, and she'll send a big strong bad man, bigger than Fiddler even, and he'll march him off to Edinburgh and put him in a real jail, not like the one in Durkie, but one you can't get out of. And he'll stay there for God knows how long, and maybe he'll never get out at all.

The truth of all that is written on Fiddler's face and on his softening hands; it is written on the Provost's flickering tongue and the cockiness of his adam's apple, that jumps up and down like a jack-in-the-box. The three of us sit waiting patiently. What is the Provost going to do with us? He hasn't told us anything, but it's plain that we are all waiting for someone or something.

The Provost is paying great attention to papers on his desk, reading them, putting them away, taking out others, and the three of us watch him with attention, with respect almost.

I looked on Effie: her face is tired, and her eyes are empty; there's a droop to her body that I have never seen there before. A sudden fear caught my heart, for Effie looks sick; but then I remember that it is only

two weeks since she had her child. How strange that seems, only two weeks! I had almost forgotten it, it seems so long ago. She ought to be taking things easy, not going to jail.

"Effie," I whispered to her, "do you feel tired?"

She smiled so faintly, so indistinctly, that her face looked as if it might be under water. She shook her head as if it were screwed on tight and was hard to move, she talked as if the words were hot in her mouth and sore to put out. "I feel nothing," she said.

"My wife is ill," I said to the Provost. "She's been laid up for the last three weeks." But I might just as well be talking to a wooden dummy.

"Your wife," he said, "can go home, provided"—he held his finger stiff like a prophet's—"provided she gives me the name of the man that killed her husband." Then he coughed quaintly. "Her first husband, that is." He jerked his head back and forth in silly laughter.

I looked at Effie. "Effie," I said, "will you not do it?"

"Tomorrow will be time enough," she answered listlessly.

I could see that Fiddler was torn in two ways; he could tell who killed Ernest himself, for he knew, but he also knew Effie's plan and her wish, so, like myself, he was tongue-tied.

There was a sound of feet down the hall; the Provost jumped up and opened the door. Two faces were pushed past his to look at us; the three in a clot marched across the room, and turned again to look us over. The face of one of them was familiar to me: I had seen him before at the crossroad with other lads, working in the hayfield taking in the hay. The other one was new to me, although he must be of the town. They were to act as policemen, that was plain. It was comical to watch them, they were puffed out with pride and gawky with self-consciousness.

The Provost crossed to the door, saying as he went, "You two will wait here till I get the keys."

Now all our eyes were focused on each other, criss-cross like the strings in a net.

"Are you frae Durkie?" asked Fiddler.

"Aye," they answered, more out of surprise than willingness to talk.

"You're hired by the Provost to look after us, are you?" choked Fiddler.

They turned their red faces one to the other, despair written awkwardly in their eyes. With their eyes they begged each other what to do, should they answer or should they take no heed.

"Can you not talk?" sneered Fiddler. "You're the first policemen I have ever run across who couldna talk."

This shook them into decision. "Aye," said one, "we can talk when it suits us."

But the other was not so quick with his wits. "Aye, we're hired by the Provost," he said, "tomorrow too. I was working, bringing in the quae, when they came after me; it's the first time anything like this has happened." He was still stunned, you could see that, by the suddenness of the whole thing. "I was in the big field." And he wagged his head in the direction of where he thought the field was, which was away off, for I knew the one he meant. "I was bringing in the quae when they came—"

"Hold your wheesh," hissed the other lad. "You've said that already."

The words withered on his lips, but he was slow-witted and once having started a sentence he couldn't but finish it, so he sucked the coming words back into his mouth, where they slobbered around and were eventually swallowed.

Fiddler shrugged his shoulders. "You're a fine pair of lummocks," he spat at them.

They stood, their faces getting redder.

"When I was a young lad," kept on Fiddler, "nobody could hae hired me to act as policeman to abuse my fellow creatures." He spat on the floor at their feet. "What kind of scum are you?"

They looked at the spittle at their feet, they looked

at each other, they looked at Fiddler, they looked at the door, hoping for the Provost to come in. I felt sorry for them, they were so big and unwieldy and helpless.

"Och!" said Fiddler in disgust. "You're not worth abusing."

And so there was a heavy, beating silence, a wincing silence, that kept one from trying to breathe.

Effie rose and crossed over to the window and stood looking out. I thought of how she had done the same thing at home, but here there was nothing for her to look at, there's no grave in the garden here, but nevertheless she stood on and fixed her eyes on one spot and kept them there, and the tears came and filled her eyes, but did not fall. The two farmers looked at her with their mouths hanging open. You could see gathering on their faces the shadows of the facts they had heard about her. Grudging admiration for her fine figure and strong neck filled their eyes, mingled with a secret lasciviousness which the evil that they knew of her excited in them.

Fiddler looked at her; his look held two things. "I want this woman, but this woman's broken my spirit; it's for this woman I've been dragged along the highroad and spoken down to by a man that I could drown with my spittle; it cost her three pounds to get her lover off, but it's cost me my self-respect and my sense of freedom forever."

I looked at her and all my pity and all my love rushed out from me to her, and left me with the bitterness that I felt for myself and my small complaints. It seems so hard to remain decent through any trouble. Only Effie remained pure and clear as a diamond, and which one of us has gone through what she has gone through?

XI

THERE are some things that are beyond telling, beyond emotion almost. I was beyond speech when I said good-night to Effie, when I had left her locked in her stone room that used to be a small cow byre, when I had seen her white face cut in pieces by the iron bars that were stretched across the window through which she smiled at me, and when her hand had slipped coolly from mine, like one who has been drowned.

She had spoken to me in a voice that seemed not to come from her but from someone miles away, that I on my part seemed not able to capture, so far above my head it seemed, "Tomorrow, John; I'll see you tomorrow."

I stood on the wrong side of the locked door, not able to move nor speak. I felt naked and lost. Where was I to go? Who could I talk to? I laid my hand flat on the side of the whitewashed wall. "Effie! Effie!"

I felt rather than saw the Provost jerking his way toward me, and I turned and fled, stumbling as I went. I heard his voice jangling words at me, but I was beyond hearing or understanding. I cut through the people that hung around the door of Provost's house, and I might have been walking through pitch-blackness, for I never saw nor heard them. Then I sensed more than saw that I was on the highroad and broke into a run for the minister's.

He saw me at the gate. He had been hovering around the windows of his house hoping someone would come by. He had been sorely frightened and torn with anxiety for Effie. "What have they done with her? What are they going to do? Oh, if I only had some power over them! But I am useless, nothing I say has any power. I tried," he said, "outside the Provost's, to get at some of them, but I am a man in disgrace. They turned their backs on me and once or twice they laughed outright in my face. Oh, it all seems so wicked."

I told him how things were and how Effie had to stay the night in jail.

"Could you leave her?" he asked me, his eyes growing cold.

"I had no choice," I answered. "I wanted to stay with her, but the Provost wouldn't hear of it." I told him of Fiddler and how he was to escape and of the money I had got for the two men and the coat and the odds and ends for Fiddler, to help him get away tonight.

"Oh, I see," he said. "Oh, I see; that's why she wouldn't give the stranger's name away tonight?"

"Nor she won't tomorrow, either."

"If Fiddler gets away?" said Minister.

"Aye," I answered, "if Fiddler gets away."

I had told him all there was to tell and now we stared vacantly and nervously at each other. I wished at that moment that we had been two women; we could have fallen in each other's arms and cried it out and got some comfort from it.

Minister jumped up suddenly. "You don't think," he said, "that we could go to the Provost? Perhaps he might let us see Effie."

I shook my head. "There isn't a hope. I asked him all that, and besides Effie told me that she would rather stay quietly. She said, 'I'll rest a little,' and she said, 'Don't worry, John, about me being here; I don't mind as much as you might think.' And I know that she meant it."

He felt better after I had told him that.

"But we'll go first thing in the morning," I said.

"Yes," he answered; then, with a greater show of weakness than I have ever seen him give in to, he hung his head and said, "When tomorrow comes."

We sat in silence, lost in our thoughts, until dark overtook us and hid us one from the other, and then with our voices we found each other again, and since we could not see each other's face we forgot to be self-conscious and talked our hearts out freely. Minister told me what I always knew, of his love for Effie.

"The first time I ever saw her, she got hold of me, and I could never put her out of my mind," he said. "She has a rare quality, Effie Gallows. It isn't her good looks or her character or her way of looking at things; it's something else; it's something very hard to explain. It's something that you feel everybody ought to have on the strength of their being alive, and yet I have never met anyone but her who had it."

I knew what he was trying to say—not the word for it, but the feeling. I might have tried to help him out, but I knew what it meant to him to be able to talk about her, and I didn't want to cheat him out of a word of it, so I sat back limply and let his words slip gratefully over me, catching and holding on to the

finest of the things he said of her, recognizing happily the familiar ones, the things that I felt about her, feeling in a way that all the things he said of her and all the things I felt were to be hoarded in my brain as an offering to her, to be kept and given to her when she needed them most.

"She has a light in her," said Minister, "that's what she has. When you look at Effie you see something that nothing can touch and that, somehow, I can't believe could ever die. I am not saying this, mind you, in a religious sense; it's nothing to do with that. It has almost nothing to do with Effie even, it's just something that she carries around in her, or maybe it's something that we all have in us; but in her it's clearer, maybe it's that her whole self gives it a better chance to come through."

His voice broke down with weariness. "Oh, I can't say what I mean, but I will say this, that whatever it is that I see in Effie, it's the only thing that I ever felt had any truth in it. It's a mystery, it's a great mystery, but for me it's the only sure thing in life."

"Perhaps that's why most people hate her," I said; "it's because she has something that they don't understand."

"Aye, that's it," said Minister. "It's not only because it's different, it's because it's something that can't be touched, it's beyond all the household laws or the

laws of justice. It can neither be called good nor bad, it's a strange superiority that she has over the rest of them, and they'll never forgive her, and when they try her tomorrow it's that in her they are trying to catch hold of; but of course they'll never lay hands on it, for they don't know what it is, and Effie herself is not aware of it."

The mention of tomorrow threw me into a chaos of frightened feelings. If only I could have been with Effie now! It was all very well, I thought, bitterly, to sit here saying fine things about her, but she was locked in a damp outhouse. If there was only something I could do! But it was hopeless; everything had been taken out of my hands. It was just as if Effie and me and Minister and Fiddler had been thrown into a vacuum; there was nothing we could do or that could be done. Our liberty had been taken from us, we were in a vacuum where all our wishes and gestures counted for nothing, where they were in fact neither seen nor heard.

The door creaked and opened and a voice came from what was Minister's housewife, asking, "Can I lay the cloth? It's past time!" She brought in a lamp and placed it on the mantel. Minister and I blinked at each other. The sudden light had flattened our faces. The old woman, as she laid the table, threw pious looks at me; she was plainly sorry for me in my trouble. It irritated me beyond words; I felt so fat

and smug and loathsome sitting there being pitied when Effie was sitting alone on her hard bed, waiting for tomorrow to come. We sat gloomily staring at the cooling cups of tea and the food that neither of us could touch. The old lady started to rattle and poke at the dying fire.

"Don't do that," said Minister fiercely. "We don't need a fire." The old woman looked around dumbly, as if she couldn't believe her eyes, then she gently laid the poker on the hearth and scuffled out of the room.

"Will you spend the night here?" said Minister to me, and I was only too happy to say yes. The idea of sitting alone in the Grey House was too much for me. "We might take a walk," said Minister timidly, as if he were not sure of how I would greet the idea.

A strong wind had come up, remnants of dead leaves that somehow or other had endured so long were rattled up and down the road like pieces of tin. A faint moon seemed to be lost in the sky and was being blown about. We walked on slowly and silently, fighting the wind which blew in our faces. Gradually the night deepened, the black clouds curdled and the moon was blown away. The dead leaves were whirled in circles and caught up and thrown away; trees tugged at their roots and dead branches were snapped off and

lay shivering on the ground. All the loose pieces of life seemed to have been swept away, and now the wind swept its great arm over a cleared earth, rejoicing in an obstacle worthy of its strength. A thread of lightning, thrown like a spear from the gliding clouds, buried itself in the soaring woods and was lost. Round black, solid noises of thunder came belching over the tense fields and eventually melted into the distance. Drops of rain, dejected and slothful, hesitated and fell on a slant, one by one.

Minister turned his back on the wind and pulled me by the arm to the same position. We stood leaning forward. "Is Effie afraid of storms?" he called out.

"No," I called back. "She always liked them."

We turned and faced the wind again and its force made me gasp. It was hard to walk now, but we kept on. The rain was waking up and beat on our faces hard and fast. The wind, the lightning, the thunder worked in unison, sometimes together, sometimes alone; then the lightning, like a wilful child, as if its interest had suddenly been captured by some other place, suddenly left us, and we could see its faint glimmer miles off. The thunder, not so swift or so fickle, grovelled heavily after. Now only the wind and the rain were left and the heart seemed to have gone out of them. And then, as if they had been paid workers and their master had gone, they slackened

in their work and soon stopped altogether; and so, the storm was over.

The trees stood weeping and shaken by the roadside; the clouds were slowly tidied and the moon had found her place again in the sky, where she hung serene and heavy, and dappled the clouds with shadows and soothed the earth with light.

We sat around the fire all night. Minister had lit it again with his numb fingers, numb with the cold. I lit the lamp and avoided looking at it with my wind-sore eyes; we ate again, bread and butter and tea. The bareness of our meal took the sting of self-indulgence from it. Whisky we wouldn't touch or even mention, though both our thoughts were on it. We waited, waited for the night to pass, painfully aware of the coming and going of the heavy, shapeless, clumsy minutes that cluttered up the hours and were like an anchor to a wind-blown ship, holding it from movement and the possibility of escape. . . .

Tick! tick! tick! and Minister moves his position. I look at the clock; but seven minutes have passed since I last looked at it. It is but quarter to three. Perhaps Fiddler will have escaped; perhaps he is at this moment escaping? My heart is pierced with anxiety; it feels as if a splinter of wood had been lodged in it.

But what nonsense, I think to myself, what do I know of what's happening? I sit here tied in knots about something that I imagine is happening. When have I ever known what was happening or been able to foretell what would happen? It's strange that one never gets used to complete loneliness. There is no real contact with anything or anyone out of one's sight.

Now the dawn is coming; it's as if a sick face had appeared at the window; everything in the room has turned grey, and the fire has shivered and tried to go out, but Minister pounces on it and shakes it into a weak brightness. He covers the wound he has made with fresh coal and the tired cinders are goaded into life. The sun limps wearily into her place again, so miserly and so uninterested that one feels that she must have turned her back on the world.

By six o'clock we were knocking at the Provost's door. It was snapped open by the Provost himself, who flew at us in a rage. He pecked and fluttered and twittered with rage, for Fiddler had got away. I stood my ground like a good-natured idiot, hardly able to keep the smile off my face while he pelted me with his trivial insults.

Minister, forever kindly, tried to soothe him down

with, "Calm yourself, Provost. I am sure there is no one that will blame you."

He was made utterly speechless by this remark, his voice broke altogether; it sounded like a violin being played by one who didn't know how. "Me," he screeched, "me! And why should I be blamed?" He caught at the collar of his coat and rattled it frantically. "I am here, I'll have you know, to blame, not to be—" But his voice failed him and he turned, in need of action, and almost danced down the hall.

We followed after and entered the room that we had been in yesterday, but Effie wasn't there. I had made up my mind that she was there in that room, and when I found that she wasn't, I felt myself trembling.

"Can I see my wife at once? I would like to see her at once."

But the Provost, who had his back to me, motioned me to keep quiet. In one hand he held up to his mouth a handkerchief which he was coughing and spitting into. He gave one final wipe at his mouth and turned around, folding his handkerchief into a round ball and stuffing it into his pocket. His face was yellow, his eyes were sagging with weariness, but the pupils glittered with fever, his rage had taken it out of him. I realized then that he was a very sick man and I was glad, although, to be fair, I had to admit to myself that it partly explained his manner.

"Your wife will be in soon." He had to sit down, cautiously and painfully. He raised his eyes and searched out mine, and for a moment the hollow, aching, fear-ridden eyes of a sick man burned into mine and begged me to give him some look that would convince him that he was not going to die.

The door was thrown open and here was Effie and the two farmer lads. I stood dumbfounded and looked at her. She saw my amazement and laughed outright. She was gay, insolent, and bitter-looking and charged with fine anger. I haven't seen her this way since the day she married Ernest. I was horrified and afraid; this was no mood to be in to go to a trial. But there she was, at her most vital, and beautiful and shameless. I had to admit the last to myself, for it was true, although not in a worldly sense; shameless in the sense that you felt that nothing could touch her, either good or bad. Yet she was not insensitive; it was almost being too sensitive. She was like a creature from another world who didn't know anything of the laws and prejudices of this world.

We all looked at her, for it was impossible not to; she was like a magnet that drew our eyes, and well she knew it, and she turned her head this way and that and took us up one by one with her look, and with a twist of her expression threw us down. She was cruel through it all, yet horribly innocent.

I felt the tears come to my eyes; I felt lost. There was no way of getting at her. I knew that at this time I was no different to her than any other; that I meant no more to her than either of the farmer lads that stood looking at her with their mouths hanging open, forgetting even their shame while they watched her. They felt guilty because they had slept while Fiddler made his escape.

"Effie," I said pleadingly, "did you manage to sleep out there?"

She looked at me with false seriousness, mocking my expression. "Aye, I liked it out there; I slept like a saint, like a healthy saint. Only"—she pointed her finger at one of the farmer lads—"only, that one, or is it that one, snores." She put her hands over her ears and closed her eyes. "I never heard such snoring in all my life; it's a wonder one didn't wake the other." Then she laughed gaily. "When you wed, either of you, pick out a couple of deaf lassies! Oh, no, even that wouldn't do, for even they could hear you. They will have to be deaf mutes or they would nag the life out of you." The poor farmers had collapsed; they panted with shame and sweltered with self-consciousness. She laughed again. "You were both so grand yesterday; you were like a couple of loud-crowing cocks and now— Oh, it's a shame; you're both so fine and ordinary. But you seem to have one sin; you both

love your sleep, you love it so much that you can't be decently quiet about it. You have to roar and grunt with joy. But never mind, the day's coming"—she softened her voice to a croon—"when you're going to sleep so fine, and nobody will wake you up, for they won't even hear you. And you can sleep on and on—"

"Effie!" I said. "Effie!"

The Provost got to his feet; he drew out his watch. "We had better be going now," he said. He looked at Effie a little frightened. "You will walk between the lads there; you two behind." He wiggled his finger at Minister and me. "I'll go on ahead." We trooped out into the hall in that formation; the Provost was coughing. Effie's voice rang cool down the hall after him.

"You have a bad cold, Provost, haven't you? I hope it's nothing serious." He dashed on ahead to get out of reach of her words. It was the thing that he obviously couldn't bear to be told about. Effie turned her head to me smiling. "That's how to get his dander," she said gaily.

There were few people about, for which I was grateful. We walked on stolidly, trying by slight irregularities of speed to make this look as little like a procession as possible, for we were all self-conscious, all but Effie, who walked free and easy, looking about

her with bright pleasure. Minister was sore worried; he kept his eyes on her and often shook his head mournfully, saddened by misgivings.

We were getting close to the road that led to the schoolhouse now. First to the left and then to the right; how well I knew it! The road narrowed right here; it became a lane almost; we had but one curve to go around, then we could see it. In the mornings I have made that curve, usually in a hurry, and in the evenings circled it slowly back again! And now, of course, here I was with four others and my dear Effie being marched to it as if we were prisoners. We curved the bend and there was the schoolhouse, so sudden and so close I felt as if it had been thrown in my face.

We halted for a second out of sheer embarrassment, for the place was swarming with folks all in their best clothes; some of them had noticed us and were telling the others; heads were violently screwed around. A hush had fallen on them. Now we had to face a wall of sneering faces; we had to break through the wall; we had almost to separate the faces with our hands. We followed like sheep after the Provost with his "To one side, please; make room!"

And then a woman's voice, distorted with excitement towered above the Provost's, calling out, "Oh, Effie Gallows, I wouldna be you—"

Instantly the crowd was on fire with words thrown

at Effie's head: "How does her ladyship feel now?" "Did you sleep well last night?"

And then one voice, the only voice with a personal ring to it, and Effie drew her breath in quickly and turned her head to face the voices and clenched her teeth against that one voice that chanted out, "You canna avoid God's hand for ever!"

"Mistress Weir, of course," I said to myself. "Why not? She would naturally be here."

We were arranged at last, and the Provost climbed to the teacher's stool behind the desk. Effie sat on a chair at his right, facing us all. Minister and I and the two farmer lads were alone in the front row. Behind us on the desks and on the benches pressed flat against the wall and bulging through the doorway, seeping more and more into the room, sitting even on the window-sills, were the people of Durkie, out for enjoyment and revenge, although the revenge was but one of the desires that made up their enjoyment. They were out primarily to enjoy themselves, thoroughly, sexually, satisfyingly, for they were out to torture, and that, I have decided, is every man, woman, and child's utmost sensation in pleasure; it is the thing they actually need; all other pleasures are pleasant to certain educated sides of their natures; but this is Nature; and this ideal pleasure combines all other pleasures and is completely, exhaustingly satisfying to them.

Well, anyhow, here we are, and the crowd is watering at the mouth, dressed in their best, and pleasantly hearing their heartbeats, watching, watching, so that not a line of pain, not a movement of terror shall escape from Effie without their sucking it in and growing fat on it.

I looked on Effie; I wanted to see her from this distance, to see how she seemed to me in this trouble. I looked at her critically, to try and see her as if I hardly knew her. She was sitting with her head a little inclined, looking at her hands that were crossed in her lap. Her face was at this moment more beautiful than I thought any face could be. It was like a head in a painting that everything had been given to. It had that quality of vibrant stillness, of worshipped tragedy that great paintings sometimes have. I gazed at her, losing my soul to her, wanting to fall on the ground and weep at her feet. I looked around frantically at the crowd. Surely, surely they must see what I see; nobody could be as blind as that. But what I saw sickened me and my bile rose in my throat and I wanted to spit it over them.

The Provost was wiping the phlegm from his mouth. He was drawing a folded piece of paper from his breast pocket; he was opening it up like a screen. He held it flat and hung over it, bracing himself on his hands which he arched like tents, to lean on. He

began to read from his paper and his voice took on an unconscious ministerial tone which must have been hard for him to keep to since his normal tone was high and colourless. He was saying:

"I don't suppose that there is a man in Durkie who is not aware of the reason of this meeting. We are gathered here to try and come to some understanding about an affair, a lamentable affair that took place in the Autumn of this year of grace, on the Fair grounds the last day of our Fair. You all know to what I refer, to the wilful killing of one of our brothers by some person unknown. You have read the notices posted in the village, and the reward offered for the capture of the man suspected. This woman here"—he bent his head down to Effie—"came to me, as you know, when the fiddler was arrested, declaring that he was innocent, that she knew of the real murderer. Since it was this own woman's husband who was murdered on the Fair grounds, it will seem to all you virtuous women a most incriminating, Godless thing this woman has done in not offering this man up to justice long ago, whoever he is."

He had to turn the page, and this gave him a chance to lift his head and look at his audience. His mouth kneaded with excitement and his eyes, although tired, dilated with conceit. But nobody in the audience had their eyes on him. They listened to what he said

with relish, but their eyes they kept pointed at Effie. He was annoyed, taken aback; he pouted like a sulky child; he flipped over his piece of paper in a rage; dropping his laboured elocution and making up his mind that since his power was not noticed or given its due, he would waste no further time or effort on them. After all, he was a sick man and this whole thing was taking it out of him. . . .

So the rest of his speech was hard to follow. His voice blistered and broke and wilted and was revived again, and the length of his speech was scabbed with dry coughs. But I heard him say: "And so the reward was arranged for and duly given them." He dwelt with tiresome weariness on Fiddler's escape, on his lack of honour in so doing, since he was on his word to come to the meeting. He gravely suspected that he was, in truth, the guilty party, or why should he have been loath to face a fair body of men like the assembled, whose only desire was to find out the truth and have the murderer turned over to justice, and so put a stop to this sort of horror taking place in our midst and putting a smirch on the fair name of Durkie?

He was at the point of exhaustion. He let his arms dangle loose by his sides. "And so," he whimpered, "I will turn this woman over to you, since she has promised to tell the true murderer's name. Whoever it concerns can question her and she must answer."

He almost doubled up on his stool. His handkerchief was whipped from his pocket and his lips wearily wiped. I was sorry for him; he had begun so grandly.

There was a torrent of voices of whispers that made a sound like red-hot iron going into water. The eyes had left Effie and were turned on an old woman whom I knew to be Mistress Weir. Effie, with the heat of their eyes off her, straightened her shoulders and tossed her head, bracing herself against their questions. The dawn of a strange smile shadowed her lips.

I made a little rush across to her. "I am with you, Effie, don't forget."

"Then you're on the wrong side!" she whispered back.

"Go back to your place!" commanded the Provost.

Arms like the ribbons of a may-pole were stretched up urging Mistress Weir to rise to her feet. She stood up and these arms were slackened from her; bright little nods of encouragement were being signalled to this woman who, God knows, needed none. Mistress Weir stood, a trembling leaf in a happy wind.

I looked around to take her in. "The happy, happy old woman," I thought to myself. "Her time has come at last." For she stood there reeling with her joy, almost stupefied by her good fortune. I watched the discoloured cheeks and the vein-blurred eyes. I watched

the blue hand that was like an eagle's claw, thin and without hair like an eagle's claw. I watched its devouring movements while it stroked slowly over her heart that hung somewhere behind her flat, pendulous breasts.

"Dear God," I thought to myself, "aren't these things alone enough to make this woman humble: the hanging breasts and the bloodshot eyes? Are they not enough to occupy your mind, to weaken your devouring hate? They should have led you past all human desires, to fields of richer misery, to grope with life itself and give pity to the human souls that are caught in it. Or is it because Effie's eyes are clear as coloured glass and that because her breasts are wildly round? But Effie knows now what you have learned: that her firm body and her steady eyes at the end of a stretch of years are yours for the asking. Have patience, old woman! Life will give you for a sacrifice to your hate what life has already taken from you."

Her voice rang strangely clear and vibrant for so old a woman. "I want to know, Effie Gallows, who it was killed my son."

After that there was a silence, when hearts could almost be heard sounding, like the ticking of clocks in the clock-mender's shop.

Effie looked up with no expression that you could

notice. "Your son is dead! Does it matter who it was killed him?"

"Aye, it matters to me, it matters to me!" screamed Mistress Weir. "Everybody that's here wants to know, and I want to know, too. It's my right to know."

"If I were to tell you," said Effie, "how much finer would it make you feel? Would it make you mourn your son the less? . . . Why should I tell you?"

Indignant voices had begun to blur the silence left after Effie's last words. "Hey, Provost," called out a man's voice, "should she be allowed to talk back like that?" But the Provost was ill and incapable of much conviction. I think in a way that he blamed them for this scene and he had lost some sympathy for them when they had shown no great attention to his address. Apparently it had meant much to him, to his pride, so he flapped their voices wearily down with his hand and listlessly whined: "You'll have to fight it out between yourselves. This woman isn't a prisoner exactly; this isn't a true court proceeding." And then pettishly: "I have done all I can do and all I am going to do. You'll have to fight it out yourselves."

The old woman went on: "I didna come here to be asked questions by the likes of you. I came to know one thing, and you're going to tell me or I'll know why!"

She and Effie looked each other fully in the face.

Mistress Weir's was working with rage; Effie was calm, and detached, and you might say that she felt nothing at all. The look continued long and steady. Then Effie threw it off with a shake of her head.

She said, clear and determined: "I will never tell you!"

There was a roar at this; words and names were tossed about; fists were shaken, desks were thumped by clenched hands. Ernest's mother stood like a flickering flame being blown about by the gust of their rage. She twisted and writhed and matched her anger against theirs, for she wanted quiet, although she was delighted with their temper and the backing it gave her. At last she had her way and the clawlike hands were still and crossed in triumph.

"Why will you not tell me, Effie Gallows? Is it that you're partial to him that you won't give him away?"

"I won't tell you that, either," answered Effie.

"What will you tell me then, Effie Gallows?"

"I will tell you nothing, nothing at all, for there is no need for it and nothing would be gained by it. When Fiddler was caught and brought to jail, that was different; I wasn't for seeing him suffer for another one's actions. But Fiddler got away and things are just as they were, and if you're interested to find out who it was killed Ernest, then go and scurry about the country all of you, like rabbits. And when you make mis-

takes I'll be kind enough to tell you of it, as I did with Fiddler. But I am not interested in bringing a man to what you call justice, or killing anybody new, so I'll have nothing to do with it, and I will not tell you his name, not even if you threaten me with Edinburgh or jail or the gallows, so you might as well all go away to your homes and wait, and perhaps God in his mercy some fine day will deliver into your hands some poor sinner that you can wreak your lust on."

The room was a whirlpool of shouts and noises, of shaking heads and whirling arms; some man thumped me on the back and I turned around to see a spluttering mouth writhing in a red face and one hand pointed dramatically at Effie. But what was he saying? I couldn't hear for the noise of the others. My heart was beating painfully, for I was sore afraid for Effie. I wished passionately that she hadn't come out the way she had. She could have been just as decided without calling them names and arousing their anger, and yet at the same time her recklessness had given me a sense of freedom and strength that I felt was good for my whole being, no matter what it brought on us. One can't go about humbly for ever; the time comes when one has to give one's person the dignity it demands, by being alive, but nevertheless, my nature being what it is, I know I would have chosen an easier time.

Now everyone looked to the Provost. They felt that his authority was needed, but he shook his head feebly and spat into his handkerchief and leant his damp forehead on his burning hand. He had given up, that was plain. They realized it, and the fact not only heightened their anger but relieved them of the last shadow of restraint, so their voices grew louder, their gestures more defiant. Suddenly there was a rush forward, for Effie had got on her feet and was walking slowly toward the door. Before she reached it her way was blocked. I stood on my feet also, not sure what to do.

Effie's face was charged with sudden anger. "You have no right to stop me leaving," she said. "I am a free person. I can do as I wish, and I don't wish to stay here any longer."

Then one of the cotters spoke out. "You are here," he said, "because there's something we want to get out of you; and you're not going to leave until we're satisfied." There were other voices shouting assent.

I went up to Effie, touching her gently on the arm. "Give in to them," I said to her, "it will be best in the long run."

She turned her eyes on me that were vaguely hurt, vaguely bewildered. "I don't understand what it is that they want of me exactly. I've told them that I won't tell. They can't hope to force it out of me and

besides, John, I really feel ill, and every time they question me I feel as if I were going mad." She said the last with a show of exhaustion. And it was true, for there were dark shadows around her eyes and the skin on her cheeks looked thin and cold.

"We believe that you are to blame for Ernest Weir's death, and we are going to find out just how," said the same voice that had spoken before.

Effie closed her eyes for a moment, then as she opened them she drew a long sigh. "All right," she said, "if you want to question me further, I'll tell you anything that you want to know, all but one thing." And with that she walked back over to her chair and sat down. There was a scuffle of people getting back to their seats and then silence.

The Provost slid painfully off his high chair and came and sat by me; spluttering into my ear, he said: "It's all for no good, all this. I had no thought that it would lead to this. I come from Edinburgh myself, but I always held the opinion that country folks were kinder in their ways. I live pretty well by myself here, out of things, you know. I believe in justice, mind you, but only when meted out by them that knows how."

I looked at him, sick at heart. What a fool of a man! I felt I wanted to smash his face in, sitting there telling me that he believed in justice. "Who, you damn fool,"

I wanted to shout at him, "who made all this possible?" But what's the use? It was too late now, and anyhow he probably would never see it, so all I did was edge away from him, for he had been hanging over me to make his voice heard, and at times the spray of his splutter had spotted my face and made me feel ill.

The cotter who had spoken in the first place seemed to have been picked out as spokesman. I looked around to tell where his voice came from and saw him standing at the back. Mistress Weir was at his side; she was tugging at his coat with her thin blue hand. He bent down ceremoniously to hear what she had to say. She might have been an old queen, by the attention he gave her.

"What did your bairn die of?" It was a shrill woman's voice asking this.

Effie shivered, but answered at once in a voice that had suddenly become dead: "It died because it was born weakly." Then she looked up with horror, for it had dawned on her what the question implied.

Effie's child and its death apparently had been highly discussed in Durkie, and by the remarks they threw at her it was clear what conclusion they had come to about its death.

"The midwife said it was healthy enough."

"Why do you not wear black?"

"Who is the bairn's father?"

"Does he know it's dead?"

Then a voice thin with fright at the power of its owner's reasoning said in a rush: "The man that is the father of your bastard, that's the man that killed Ernest Weir, and that's for why you will not tell his name!"

There was a hush; it was as if a voice had spoken down from the sky some absolute truth. They were stunned by it, held speechless by it, made drunk by it, and their heavy eyes that had been rolling in intellectual awe of their own capacity for understanding, were slowly turning on Effie, devouring her with fresh interest, seeing her in a fresh rôle, one awful enough to justify their thoughts of her. I believe that they almost felt love for her at this moment. Before, their hatred and suspicions had been vague and unstable, and it wore them out having to imagine to think up crimes which would seem logical; and now they had it, for the first time they had it!

"You slut!" screamed out Mistress Weir. "You slut! You slut!"

It was taken up by others, and worse than that they called her; they called on God to strike her dead. How long they kept it up, I can't say; it seemed forever. They threw their words like mud in her face, by the twists of intonation and the filth of their suggestion they threw their coiling sentences like the entrails of

some dead rat in her face, and she sat through it all calm and cold, neither weeping nor begging for pity. Then slowly, so slightly that even I who was watching her with all my heart hardly noticed it, she let her head loll weakly to one side and the eyes closed carefully and whitely, and the next moment she was lying white as death on the floor.

As I knelt beside her they screamed with laughter, laughter so focused on me and so piercing that I felt pinned to the ground by it. I rubbed her cold hands and looked around frantically for help, for Minister. He must have rushed out when Effie fainted, for there he was coming toward us with a handkerchief that had been dipped in water dripping in his hand. The people's laughter took new strength when they saw that, but it was nothing to me now. I wiped Effie's brow with the wet handkerchief and the back of her neck and the cold lips.

They started to crowd around, to look down on us. They looked as long as they had patience, then one by one with lewd or self-righteous remark according to their thoughts, they left us and walked out of the schoolhouse and into the open.

"Effie, Effie!" I closed my arms around her; I pressed her close to my body so that she might take of the warmth of mine. Minister took the handkerchief and again brought it dripping back. She opened her eyes

and looked up at me dully, and then as if she hadn't strength enough to keep them open, they closed more of their own will than hers.

Later she made a great show of being all right, and strong enough for the walk back, but Minister and I knew better, and together we half carried her, half walked her out of the schoolhouse.

XII

WE clustered like three condemned souls, tragic and forlorn, down the shadowy lane with halting uneven steps. Around the bend was the clear road that led like a ribbon to Durkie, Durkie that rose like a knot on the road's smoothness, and through Durkie we had to pass unless we took to the field and the hills. We might go to Minister's house, which wasn't as far as the Grey House, but it was in the village, and to walk through the village was more than any of us could face.

We left the road, and dipped deeply into the pine woods that ran for a quarter of a mile by the roadside. It was difficult and dazzling walking, but the relief we felt at being hidden lightened our hearts and we

put on a pathetic show of mock gayness partly to try and comfort Effie, and because it seemed necessary to jog our spirits up in some way.

"We'll go to Edinburgh, won't we Effie? as soon as we can?" said Minister. "In a day or two?"

And Effie smiled.

And I felt like jumping for joy.

"We'll start packing, won't we, Effie? right off?" I asked.

She nodded. "Tomorrow morning! No, tonight! right off!"

None of us referred once to what we had just been through, not by word or suggestion. We kept our minds on tomorrow and the next day, then on Edinburgh.

"That'll be fine, won't it, Effie?"

And tears came to her eyes and she gave a little choking laugh. "It'll be hard to believe."

And so we walked through the woods and kept on talking like children, lacing in and out between the tall trees that seemed to move around us. Then the sky came crowding through the edging trees. A few more yards to walk and we would be in the open again. How cold and bare to be in the open again; behind us the warm clump of the wee woods we had just left, in front of us the low-lying hills covered with bitter, sapless heather, over the crest of the hill tall spirals of smoke from the chimneys of Durkie.

Suddenly on the crest of the hill, from nowhere, as if they had pulled themselves out of the ground, coming slothfully, powerfully toward us are four men. At first I had the crying fanciful hope that they not only didn't see us, but that they had no interest in us. But they came straight for us as if they were walking on rails that led from them to us. There was no escaping; we stood, the three of us, looking first into each other's faces, then at them, then back at ourselves again, dumbly and tragically.

"Whatever it is," said Effie, "let us not get wrought up about it."

One of them carried a piece of paper in his hand; he fanned it in our faces. "We have a writ," he said to Effie, "to take you back to Durkie. It's from the Provost."

"Why?" I asked.

"She's to be held until she gives us the information we must have."

"Did Provost give you that?" said Minister. "Are you sure?"

The man laughed out of one side of his mouth. "We didn't have to ask him twice."

Effie stood motionless as a tree. "I must go and get it over with."

"I can't understand it," I cried. "The Provost spoke quite differently to me in the schoolhouse."

"He's a very weak man," said Effie listlessly, "and they probably forced him to do it."

Back we went and through the town that we had tried so hard to keep out of. The same laughs, the same sneers from all sides, the comfortable contented jeers from the fat wives who came running from their cottage doors to look at us and leaned comfortably on the whitewashed wall that stopped their gardens, tucking their hands under their breast to keep them warm. Again the Provost's door and the narrow passage, and the Provost ashamed to look me in the eye. And to hide his shame he forced a manner toward us that exceeded in rudeness and superiority his behaviour of this morning and yesterday.

I hung around him like a bee around the honey pot, trying to talk, trying to plead with him. "My wife is ill! You can't do this; it's a crime, I tell you. Let her go home to her house for tonight; she'll come back tomorrow."

But it was hopeless. He was a living pattern of pompous mannerisms. He drew out his watch. "You must go now; you can come and see your wife tomorrow. Nobody will stop you."

Effie was sitting on a chair. I went over to her and took her hands in mine and tears that I couldn't stop came to my eyes. "Effie, what will we do now? What can we do now?"

"You mustn't take on so, John. I can rest very well here. It was all right last night, and tomorrow"—she shrugged her shoulders—"tomorrow something may happen, and it can't be worse than it was today. Go back to the Grey House, John, and start to pack. Minister will go with you." She looked at him. "Won't you? If you have work to do you won't think on things so much, and I'll rest here and I'll see you in the morning—and, John!"

"Yes, Effie!"

"When you get to the house take a good drink of spirits. It will give you a hand. Give me a toast, both of you. After all, you know, I haven't killed anyone. They can't do anything to me. And after it's all over, it's to Edinburgh." She willed a smile, a brave quick smile.

The Provost hopped around like a robin; he was cogitating, making up his mind about something. He whirled around, twiddling his watch chain, and then with an expression of overwhelming graciousness, he wriggled at Effie, saying: "My dinner is ready. Will you have it with me, instead of out there?" He jinked his eyes gaily in the direction of the back yard where the jail was.

"Thank you," said Effie, "but I would rather not break bread with you."

"And why, may I ask?" he demanded. He was twisted already into irritation.

"I have no desire to eat, I don't want to eat; I want to rest, I want to rest, oh, so desperately!"

By her pleading we were forced into action. I helped her up and slowly we trailed from the room, for Effie was weak, weaker than I had ever seen her.

Minister and I, silent and troubled, climbed the path to the Grey House. We set to work in earnest. First we lit a fire and made tea. We brought down the trunk from the attic and I folded and put away in it any piece of clothing that came to my hand, wondering as I did so how we were to take it with us, for no carter in Durkie would carry for us, I was sure of that. But, anyhow, I was going to fill it and strap it, and on a label I wrote defiantly, "John Gallantly, Edinburgh."

Minister wandered about, pale and distraught. He looked like a hurt angel. I could almost hear him say, "I never knew that there was such cruelty in the world."

"But there is, Minister," I thought. "There is, almost more than a body can bear."

The day somehow wore itself out. It was now well on five o'clock. Effie had been in jail almost six hours, but I clenched my teeth; I wouldn't think on that. Minister and I sat by the fire and the bottle was half empty. We had held our glasses high each time and said: "To Effie—to Effie Gallows!" and drank as if it were poison we were drinking.

Fearfully I stood up. I thought I had heard something, something hard to describe. I cried out without any will to cry out and ran, still with the cry in my mouth, to the front door.

Effie, for it was Effie, lying on the ground at the foot of the steps, blood running from her hands, blood from her mouth, blood running from under her hair. At the gate were shadowy forms, and stones came whizzing from their swinging arms.

I lifted her up in my arms; I howled on Minister, although he was right there: "Shut the door! Shut the door!"

I cried like a madman, I cried as if my heart were being torn from my body. I cried as I tried to stop the flow of blood that soaked her hair. I cried as I put my ear close to her red mouth that was red with blood, for she was trying to say something. Her eyes shone out from her wounded face, puzzled, almost unbelieving.

"A child, almost a baby," she said, "threw a stone at me. Then they all did it." Then she crumpled in my arms.

Minister brought a mattress down from upstairs. We stretched it in front of the fire and we laid her carefully on it. I forced spirits down her throat and it

gradually brought her to, but she kept her eyes closed and moaned gentle, troubled moans. I looked for Minister; he was kneeling by a chair, his face buried in his arms, praying.

I rushed over to him and tore his hands from his face. "It's not as bad as that!" I cried. "It's not as bad as that!"

All that night fever burnt her up and I washed her over with cold cloths to force it down, but the fever wouldn't cool and the blood wouldn't stop dripping and she turned and twisted, delirious and tortured. Then there were little flashes, when a human look came to her eyes and she would clutch at my hands and call out: "Don't leave me, John!"

The pale light of the morning sifted through the windows like grey ash dust. And I looked with horror on Effie, for the bones of her face stood out clear like stone buttresses, and her cheeks were hollowed in. She opened her eyes only once before she died, and she looked kindly at Minister and me. Then she closed them again, but keeping her head turned in our direction, and sang out in a sweet, frail voice with all the strength that was in her, half in delirium, half consciously, accompanying her words with half-finished gestures which lacked the strength to carry them

through: "Flatten my hands upward to the sky, stretch my arms like leafless trees. Take the words from my dying throat! I am tired of people and their ways!"

I made a box, as I had made for her child, and we set it in the ground beside the smaller one, and Minister prayed and we dragged a stone from the hillside and I carved her name on it with a knife, and set it at her head. I would have liked to cover her grave with flowers, to have them growing there forever, but it was winter, and nothing would grow. I had terrible insane desires to kneel on her grave and scatter the earth with my hands and tear open the lid of the box and look on her face and hold her in my arms. But Effie is dead and Effie's beautiful face is by now a clatter of bones.

Minister and I both went to live in Edinburgh as we had planned. It seems that Provost, suddenly stricken with fear for Effie's health and not wanting to have the responsibility of her illness on his hands, decided to let her go home for the night, so—

But I am numb, and can feel neither anger nor hate as yet. The people of Durkie, quaintly touched with remorse, decided by way of consolation that I should

be offered my position as school teacher back. I declined.

So one bleak day Minister and I walked together the road that led forever from Durkie and at the last twist in the road that held the place in view, I turned around to take my last look. The streaming chimney pots, the people like ants darting from one given point to another, the tinkle of the school bell and the children from this distance, black as treacle, pouring through the schoolhouse door. One child in particular is there, a child with a habit of throwing stones.

I shift my eyes to where I know will be the last thing I look at in Durkie, a square grey house, a tousled orchard, two graves, one with a gravestone. I didn't give the child a stone. It had no need for a stone; it was too young.

I feel Minister's hand on my arm. "We mun go, John, for we have a long way to go."

I nod my head and answer, "Aye, I am coming." But to myself I say, bitterly, "Aye, I have a long way to go, far too long a way to go. . . ."